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OF

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THE CAXTON NOVELS

VOL. VI.

[Bulwer-Lytton, Edward]

"MY NOVEL"

By Pisistratus Caxton

OR

VARIETIES IN ENGLISH LIFE

"Neque enim notare singulos mens est mihi,
Verum ipsam vitam et mores hominum ostendere."
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MY NOVEL.

CHAPTER XVII.

When the scenes in some long diorama pass solemnly before us, there is sometimes one solitary object, contrasting, perhaps, the view of stately cities or the march of a mighty river, that halts on the eye for a moment, and then glides away, leaving on the mind a strange, comfortless, undefined impression.

Why was the object presented to us? In itself it seemed comparatively insignificant. It may have been but a broken column—a lonely pool with a star-beam on its quiet surface—yet it awes us. We remember it when phantasmal pictures of bright Damascus, or of colossal pyramids—of bazaars in Stamboul, or lengthened caravans that defile slow amidst the sands of Araby—have sated the wondering gaze. Why were we detained in the shadowy procession by a thing that

would have been so commonplace had it not been so lone? Some latent interest must attach to it. Was it there that a vision of woe had lifted the wild hair of a Prophet?—there where some Hagar had still the wail of her child on her indignant breast? We would fain call back the pageantry procession—fain see again the solitary thing that seemed so little worth the hand of the artist—and ask, "Why art thou here, and wherefore dost thou haunt us?"

Rise up—rise up once more—by the broad great thoroughfare that stretches onward and onward to the remorseless London.—Rise up—rise up,—O solitary tree with the green leaves on thy bough, and the deep rents in thy heart; and the ravens, dark birds of omen and sorrow, that build their nest amidst the leaves of the bough, and drop with noiseless plumes down through the hollow rents of the heart,—or are heard, it may be, in the growing shadows of twilight, calling out to their young!

Under the old pollard-tree, by the side of John Avenel's house, there cowered, breathless and listening, John Avenel's daughter Nora. Now, when that fatal newspaper paragraph, which lied so like truth, met her eyes, she obeyed the first impulse of her passionate heart,—she tore the wedding-ring from her finger,—she enclosed it, with the paragraph itself, in a letter to Audley—a letter that she designed to convey scorn and pride;—alas! it expressed only jealousy and love. She could not rest till she had put this letter into the post with her own hand, addressed to

Audley, at Lord Lansmere's. Scarce had it left her ere she repented. What had she done?—resigned the birthright of the child she was so soon to bring into the world,—resigned her last hope in her lover's honour,—given up her life of life—and from belief in what?—a report in a newspaper! No, no; she would go herself to Lansmere,—to her father's home—she could contrive to see Audley before that letter reached his hand. The thought was scarcely conceived before obeyed. She found a vacant place in a coach that started from London some hours before the mail, and went within a few miles of Lansmere; those last miles she travelled on foot. Exhausted — fainting — she gained, at last, the sight of home, and there halted,—for in the little garden in front she saw her parents seated. She heard the murmur of their voices, and suddenly she remembered her altered shape, her terrible secret. How answer the question, "Daughter, where and who is thy husband?" Her heart failed her; she crept under the old pollard-tree, to gather up resolve, to watch and to listen. She saw the rigid face of the thrifty, prudent mother, with the deep lines that told of the cares of an anxious life, and the chafe of excitable temper and warm affections against the restraint of decorous sanctimony and resolute pride. The dear, stern face never seemed to her more dear and more stern. She saw the comely, easy, indolent, good-humoured father; not then the poor paralytic sufferer, who could yet recognise Nora's eyes under the lids of Leonard, but stalwart and jovial,—first bat

in the Cricket Club, first voice in the Glee Society, the most popular canvasser of the Lansmere Constitutional True Blue Party, and the pride and idol of the Calvinistical prim wife; never from those pinched lips of hers had come forth even one pious rebuke to the careless, social man. As he sat, one hand in his vest, his profile turned to the road, the light smoke curling playfully up from the pipe, over which lips, accustomed to bland smile and hearty laughter, closed as if reluctant to be closed at all, he was the very model of the respectable retired trader in easy circumstances, and released from the toil of making money while life could yet enjoy the delight of spending it.

"Well, old woman," said John Avenel, "I must be off presently to see to those three shaky voters in Fish Lane; they will have done their work soon, and I shall catch 'em at home. They do say as how we may have an opposition; and I know that old Smikes has gone to Lonnon in search of a candidate. We can't have the Lansmere Constitutional Blues beat by a Lonnoner! Ha, ha, ha!"

"But you will be home before Jane and her husband Mark come? How ever she could marry a common carpenter!"

"Yes," said John, "he *is* a carpenter; but he has a vote, and that strengthens the family interest. If Dick was not gone to Amerikay, there would be three on us. But Mark is a real good Blue! A Lonnoner, indeed!—a Yellow from Lonnon beat my Lord and the Blues! Ha, ha!"

"But, John, this Mr Egerton is a Lonnoner!"

"You don't understand things, talking such nonsense. Mr Egerton is the Blue candidate, and the Blues are the Country Party; therefore, how can he be a Lonnoner? An uncommon clever, well-grown, handsome young man, eh! and my young lord's particular friend."

Mrs Avenel sighed.

"What are you sighing and shaking your head for?"

"I was thinking of our poor, dear, dear Nora!"

"God bless her!" cried John, heartily.

There was a rustle under the boughs of the old hollow-hearted pollard-tree.

"Ha! ha! Hark! I said that so loud, that I have startled the ravens!"

"How he did love her!" said Mrs Avenel, thoughtfully. "I am sure he did; and no wonder, for she looks every inch a lady; and why should not she be my lady, after all?"

"He? Who? Oh, that foolish fancy of yours about my young lord? A prudent woman like you! —stuff! I am glad my little beauty is gone to Lonnon, out of harm's way."

"John—John—John! No harm could ever come to my Nora. She's too pure and too good, and has too proper a pride in her, to——"

"To listen to any young lords, I hope," said John; "though," he added, after a pause, "she might well be a lady, too. My lord, the young one, took me by the hand so kindly the other day, and said, 'Have not

you heard from her—I mean Miss Avenel—lately?' and those bright eyes of his were as full of tears as—as—as yours are now."

"Well, John, well; go on."

"That is all. My lady came up, and took me away to talk about the election; and just as I was going, she whispered, 'Don't let my wild boy talk to you about that sweet girl of yours. We must both see that she does not come to disgrace.' 'Disgrace!'—that word made me very angry for the moment. But my lady has such a way with her, that she soon put me right again. Yet, I do think Nora must have loved my young lord, only she was too good to show it. What do you say?" and the father's voice was thoughtful.

"I hope she'll never love any man till she's married to him; it is not proper, John," said Mrs Avenel, somewhat starchly, though very mildly.

"Ha! ha!" laughed John, chucking his prim wife under the chin, "you did not say that to me when I stole your first kiss under that very pollard-tree—no house near it then!"

"Hush, John, hush!" and the prim wife blushed like a girl.

"Pooh," continued John, merrily, "I don't see why we plain folks should pretend to be more saintly and prudishlike than our betters. There's that handsome Miss Leslie, who is to marry Mr Egerton—easy enough to see how much she is in love with him—could not keep her eyes off from him even in church, old girl?

Ha, ha! What the deuce is the matter with the ravens?"

"They'll be a comely couple, John. And I hear tell she has a power of money. When is the marriage to be?"

"Oh, they say as soon as the election is over. A fine wedding we shall have of it! I daresay my young lord will be bridesman. We'll send for our little Nora, to see the gay doings!"

Out from the boughs of the old tree came the shriek of a lost spirit—one of those strange, appalling sounds of human agony, which, once heard, are never forgotten. It is as the wail of Hope, when SHE, too, rushes forth from the Coffer of Woes, and vanishes into viewless space;—it is the dread cry of Reason parting from clay—and of Soul, that would wrench itself from life! For a moment all was still—and then a dull, dumb, heavy fall!

The parents gazed on each other, speechless; they stole close to the pales, and looked over. Under the boughs, at the gnarled roots of the oak, they saw—grey and indistinct—a prostrate form. John opened the gate and went round; the mother crept to the roadside, and there stood still.

"Oh, wife, wife!" cried John Avenel, from under the green boughs, "it is our child Nora! Our child—our child!"

And, as he spoke, out from the green boughs started the dark ravens, wheeling round and round, and calling to their young!

. . . . . .

And when they had laid her on the bed, Mrs Avenel whispered John to withdraw for a moment; and, with set lips but trembling hands, began to unlace the dress, under the pressure of which Nora's heart heaved convulsively. And John went out of the room bewildered, and sat himself down on the landing-place, and wondered whether he was awake or sleeping; and a cold numbness crept over one side of him, and his head felt very heavy, with a loud, booming noise in his ears. Suddenly his wife stood by his side, and said, in a very low voice—

"John, run for Mr Morgan—make haste. But mind—don't speak to any one on the way. Quick, quick!"

"Is she dying?"

"I don't know. Why not die before?" said Mrs Avenel, between her teeth. "But Mr Morgan is a discreet, friendly man."

"A true Blue!" muttered poor John, as if his mind wandered; and rising with difficulty, he stared at his wife a moment, shook his head, and was gone.

An hour or two later, a little covered taxed-cart stopped at Mr Avenel's cottage, out of which stepped a young man with pale face and spare form, dressed in the Sunday suit of a rustic craftsman; then a homely, but pleasant, honest face, bent down to him, smilingly; and two arms, emerging from under covert of a red cloak, extended an infant, which the young man took tenderly. The baby was cross and very sickly; it began to cry. The father hushed, and rocked, and

tossed it, with the air of one to whom such a charge was familiar.

"He'll be good when we get in, Mark," said the young woman, as she extracted from the depths of the cart a large basket containing poultry and home-made bread.

"Don't forget the flowers that the Squire's gardener gave us," said Mark the Poet.

Without aid from her husband, the wife took down basket and nosegay, settled her cloak, smoothed her gown, and said, "Very odd!—they don't seem to expect us, Mark. How still the house is! Go and knock; they can't ha' gone to bed yet."

Mark knocked at the door—no answer. A light passed rapidly across the windows on the upper floor, but still no one came to his summons. Mark knocked again. A gentleman, dressed in clerical costume, now coming from Lansmere Park, on the opposite side of the road, paused at the sound of Mark's second and more impatient knock, and said, civilly—

"Are you not the young folks my friend John Avenel told me this morning he expected to visit him?"

"Yes, please, Mr Dale," said Mrs Fairfield, dropping her curtsy. "You remember me! and this is my dear good man!"

"What! Mark the Poet?" said the curate of Lansmere, with a smile. "Come to write squibs for the election?"

"Squibs, sir!" cried Mark, indignantly.

"Burns wrote squibs," said the curate, mildly.

Mark made no answer, but again knocked at the door.

This time, a man, whose face, even seen by the starlight, was much flushed, presented himself at the threshold.

"Mr Morgan!" exclaimed the curate, in benevolent alarm; "no illness here, I hope?"

"Cott! it is you, Mr Dale!—Come in, come in; I want a word with you. But who the teuce are these people?"

"Sir," said Mark, pushing through the doorway, "my name is Fairfield, and my wife is Mr Avenel's daughter!"

"Oh, Jane—and her baby too!—Cood—cood! Come in; but be quiet, can't you? Still, still—still as death!"

The party entered, the door closed; the moon rose, and shone calmly on the pale silent house, on the sleeping flowers of the little garden, on the old pollard with its hollow core. The horse in the taxed-cart dozed, unheeded; the light still at times flitted across the upper windows. These were the only signs of life, except when a bat, now and then attracted by the light that passed across the windows, brushed against the panes, and then, dipping downwards, struck up against the nose of the slumbering horse, and darted merrily after the moth that fluttered round the raven's nest in the old pollard.

CHAPTER XVIII.

All that day Harley L'Estrange had been more than usually mournful and dejected. Indeed, the return to scenes associated with Nora's presence increased the gloom that had settled on his mind since he had lost sight and trace of her. Audley, in the remorseful tenderness he felt for his injured friend, had induced L'Estrange towards evening to leave the Park, and go into a district some miles off, on pretence that he required Harley's aid there to canvass certain important outvoters: the change of scene might rouse him from his reveries. Harley himself was glad to escape from the guests at Lansmere. He readily consented to go. He would not return that night. The outvoters lay remote and scattered—he might be absent for a day or two. When Harley was gone, Egerton himself sank into deep thought. There was rumour of some unexpected opposition. His partisans were alarmed and anxious. It was clear that the Lansmere interest, if attacked, was weaker than the Earl would believe; Egerton might lose his election. If so, what would become of him? How support his wife, whose return to him he always counted on, and whom it would then

become him at all hazards to acknowledge? It was that day that he had spoken to William Hazeldean as to the family living.—"Peace at least," thought the ambitious man—"I shall have peace!" And the Squire had promised him the rectory if needed; not without a secret pang, for his Harry was already using her conjugal influence in favour of her old school-friend's husband, Mr Dale; and the Squire thought Audley would be but a poor country parson, and Dale—if he would only grow a little plumper than his curacy would permit him to be—would be a parson in ten thousand. But while Audley thus prepared for the worst, he still brought his energies to bear on the more brilliant option; and sat with his committee, looking into canvass-books, and discussing the characters, politics, and local interests of every elector, until the night was well-nigh gone. When he gained his room, the shutters were unclosed, and he stood a few moments at the window gazing on the moon. At that sight, the thought of Nora, lost and afar, stole over him. The man, as we know, had in his nature little of romance and sentiment. Seldom was it his wont to gaze upon moon or stars. But whenever some whisper of romance did soften his hard, strong mind, or whenever moon or stars did charm his gaze from earth, Nora's bright Muse-like face—Nora's sweet loving eyes, were seen in moon and star beam—Nora's low, tender voice, heard in the whisper of that which we call romance, and which is but the sound of the mysterious poetry that is ever in the air, would we but deign to hear it! He

turned with a sigh, undressed, threw himself on his bed, and extinguished his light. But the light of the moon *would* fill the room. It kept him awake for a little time; he turned his face from the calm, heavenly beam, resolutely towards the dull blind wall, and fell asleep. And, in the sleep, he was with Nora;—again in the humble bridal-home. Never in his dreams had she seemed to him so distinct and life-like—her eyes upturned to his—her hands clasped together, and resting on his shoulder, as had been her graceful wont—her voice murmuring meekly, "Has it, then, been my fault that we parted?—forgive, forgive me!"

And the sleeper imagined that he answered, "Never part from me again—never, never!" and that he bent down to kiss the chaste lips that so tenderly sought his own. And suddenly he heard a knocking sound, as of a hammer—regular, but soft, low, subdued. Did you ever, O reader, hear the sound of the hammer on the lid of a coffin in a house of woe,—when the undertaker's decorous hireling fears that the living may hear how he parts them from the dead? Such seemed the sound to Audley—the dream vanished abruptly. He woke, and again heard the knock; it was at his door. He sat up wistfully — the moon was gone — it was morning. "Who is there?" he cried, peevishly.

A low voice from without answered, "Hush, it is I; dress quick; let me see you."

Egerton recognised Lady Lansmere's voice. Alarmed and surprised, he rose, dressed in haste, and went to the door. Lady Lansmere was standing without, extremely

pale. She put her finger to her lip, and beckoned him to follow her. He obeyed mechanically. They entered her dressing-room, a few doors from his own chamber, and the Countess closed the door.

Then laying her slight firm hand on his shoulder, she said, in suppressed and passionate excitement—

"Oh, Mr Egerton, you must serve—serve me, and at once—Harley—Harley—save my Harley—go to him—prevent his coming back here: stay with him—give up the election—it is but a year or two lost in your life—you will have other opportunities—make that sacrifice to your friend."

"Speak — what is the matter? I can make no sacrifice too great for Harley!"

"Thanks—I was sure of it. Go then, I say, at once, to Harley; keep him away from Lansmere on any excuse you can invent, until you can break the sad news to him—gently, gently. Oh, how will he bear it—how recover the shock? My boy, my boy!"

"Calm yourself! Explain! Break what news?—recover what shock?"

"True—you do not know—you have not heard. Nora Avenel lies yonder, in her father's house—dead—dead!"

Audley staggered back, clapping his hand to his heart, and then dropping on his knee as if bowed down by the stroke of Heaven.

"My bride, my wife!" he muttered. "Dead—it cannot be!"

Lady Lansmere was so startled at this exclamation,

so stunned by a confession wholly unexpected, that she remained unable to soothe—to explain, and utterly unprepared for the fierce agony that burst from the man she had ever seen so dignified and cold—when he sprang to his feet, and all the sense of his eternal loss rushed upon his heart.

At length he crushed back his emotions, and listened in apparent calm, and in a silence broken but by quick gasps for breath, to Lady Lansmere's account.

One of the guests in the house, a female relation of Lady Lansmere's, had been taken suddenly ill about an hour or two before!—the house had been disturbed, the Countess herself aroused, and Mr Morgan summoned as the family medical practitioner. From him she had learned that Nora Avenel had returned to her father's house late on the previous evening; had been seized with brain fever, and died in a few hours.

Audley listened, and turned to the door, still in silence.

Lady Lansmere caught him by the arm—"Where are you going? Ah, can I now ask you to save my son from the awful news, you yourself the sufferer? And yet—yet—you know his haste, his vehemence, if he learnt that you were his rival—her husband; you whom he so trusted! What, what would be the result?—I tremble!"

"Tremble not—I do not tremble! Let me go—I will be back soon—and then" (his lips writhed)—"*then* we will talk of Harley."

Egerton went forth, stunned and dizzy. Mechani-

cally he took his way across the park to John Avenel's house. He had been forced to enter that house, formally, a day or two before, in the course of his canvass; and his worldly pride had received a shock when the home, the birth, and the manners of his bride's parents had been brought before him. He had even said to himself, "And is it the child of these persons that I, Audley Egerton, must announce to the world as wife!" Now, if she had been the child of a beggar—nay, of a felon—*now*, if he could but recall her to life, how small and mean would all that dreaded world appear to him! Too late—too late! The dews were glistening in the sun—the birds were singing overhead—life waking all around him—and his own heart felt like a charnel-house. Nothing but death and the dead there—nothing! He arrived at the door; it was open: he called; no one answered: he walked up the narrow stairs, undisturbed, unseen; he came into the chamber of death. At the opposite side of the bed was seated John Avenel; but he seemed in a heavy sleep. In fact, paralysis had smitten him; but he knew it not; neither did any one. Who could heed the strong hearty man in such a moment? Not even the poor anxious wife! He had been left there to guard the house, and watch the dead—an unconscious man; numbed, himself, by the invisible icy hand! Audley stole to the bedside; he lifted the coverlid thrown over the pale still face. What passed within him, during the minute he stayed there, who shall say? But when he left the room, and slowly descended the

stairs, he left behind him love and youth, all the sweet hopes and joys of the household human life—for ever and ever!

He returned to Lady Lansmere, who awaited his coming with the most nervous anxiety.

"Now," said he dryly, "I will go to Harley, and I will prevent his returning hither."

"You have seen the parents. Good heavens! do they know of your marriage?"

"No; to Harley I must own it first. Meanwhile, silence!"

"Silence!" echoed Lady Lansmere; and her burning hand rested in Audley's, and Audley's hand was as ice.

In another hour Egerton had left the house, and before noon he was with Harley.

It is necessary now to explain the absence of all the Avenel family except the poor stricken father.

Nora had died in giving birth to a child—died delirious. In her delirium she had spoken of shame—of disgrace; there was no holy nuptial-ring on her finger! Through all her grief, the first throught of Mrs Avenel was to save the good name of her lost daughter—the unblemished honour of all the living Avenels. No matron, long descended from knights or kings, had keener pride in name and character, than the poor punctilious Calvinistic trader's wife. "Sorrow later, honour now!" With hard dry eyes she mused and mused, and made out her plan. Jane Fairfield should

take away the infant at once, before the day dawned, and nurse it with her own. Mark should go with her, for Mrs Avenel dreaded the indiscretion of his wild grief. She would go with them herself part of the way, in order to command or reason them into guarded silence. But they could not go back to Hazeldean with another infant; Jane must go where none knew her; the two infants might pass as twins. And Mrs Avenel, though naturally a humane, kindly woman, and with a mother's heart to infants, looked with almost a glad sternness at Jane's puny babe, and thought to herself, "All difficulty would be over should there be only *one!* Nora's child could thus pass throughout life for Jane's!"

Fortunately for the preservation of the secret, the Avenels kept no servant—only an occasional drudge, who came a few hours in the day, and went home to sleep. Mrs Avenel could count on Mr Morgan's silence as to the true cause of Nora's death. And Mr Dale, why should he reveal the dishonour of a family? That very day, or the next at farthest, she could induce her husband to absent himself, lest he should blab out the tale while his sorrow was greater than his pride. She alone would then stay in the house of death until she could feel assured that all else were hushed into prudence. Ay, she felt that, with due precautions, the *name* was still safe. And so she awed and hurried Mark and his wife away, and went with them in the covered cart—that hid the faces of all three—leaving for an hour or two the house and the dead to her hus-

band's charge, with many an admonition, to which he nodded his head, and which he did not hear! Do you think this woman was unfeeling and inhuman? Had Nora looked from heaven into her mother's heart, Nora would not have thought so. A good name, when the burial-stone closes over dust, is still a possession upon the earth; on earth it is indeed our only one! Better for our friends to guard for us that treasure, than to sit down and weep over perishable clay. And weep! —Oh! stern mother, long years were left to thee for weeping! No tears shed for Nora made such deep furrows on the cheeks as thine did! Yet who ever saw them flow?

Harley was in great surprise to see Egerton; more surprised when Egerton told him that he found he was to be opposed—that he had no chance of success at Lansmere, and had therefore resolved to retire from the contest. He wrote to the Earl to that effect; but the Countess knew the true cause, and hinted it to the Earl; so that, as we saw at the commencement of this history, Egerton's cause did not suffer when Captain Dashmore appeared in the borough; and thanks to Mr Hazeldean's exertions and oratory, Audley came in by two votes—the votes of John Avenel and Mark Fairfield. For though the former had been removed a little way from the town, and by medical advice—and though, on other matters, the disease that had smitten him left him docile as a child (and he had but vague indistinct ideas of all the circumstances connected with Nora's return, save the sense of her loss)—yet he still

would hear how the Blues went on, and would get out of bed to keep his word: and even his wife said, "He is right; better die of it than break his promise!" The crowd gave way as the broken man they had seen a few days before so jovial and healthful was brought up in a chair to the poll, and said, with his tremulous, quavering voice, "I'm a true Blue—Blue for ever!"

Elections are wondrous things! No man who has not seen can guess how the zeal in them triumphs over sickness, sorrow, the ordinary private life of us!

There was forwarded to Audley from Lansmere Park, Nora's last letter. The postman had left it there an hour or two after he himself had gone. The wedding-ring fell on the ground, and rolled under his feet. And those burning, passionate reproaches—all that anger of the wounded dove—explained to him the mystery of her return—her unjust suspicions—the cause of her sudden death, which he still ascribed to brain fever, brought on by excitement and fatigue. For Nora did not speak of the child about to be born; she had not remembered it when she wrote, or she would not have written. On the receipt of this letter Egerton could not remain in the dull village district—alone, too, with Harley. He said, abruptly, that he must go to London—prevailed on L'Estrange to accompany him; and there, when he heard from Lady Lansmere that the funeral was over, he broke to Harley, with lips as white as the dead, and his hand pressed to his heart, on which his hereditary disease was fastening quick and fierce, the dread truth that Nora was

no more. The effect upon the boy's health and spirits was even more crushing than Audley could anticipate. He only woke from grief to feel remorse. "For," said the noble Harley, "had it not been for my passion—my rash pursuit—would she ever have left her safe asylum—ever even have left her native town? And then—and then—the struggle between her sense of duty and her love to me! I see it all—all! But for me she were living still!"

"Oh, no!" cried Egerton—his confession now rushing to his lips. "Believe me, she never loved you as you think. Nay—nay—hear me! Rather suppose that she loved another—fled with him—was perhaps married to him, and——"

"Hold!" exclaimed Harley, with a terrible burst of passion—"you kill her twice to me if you say that! I can still feel that she lives—lives here, in my heart—while I dream that she loved me—or, at least, that no other lip ever knew the kiss that was denied to mine! But if you tell me to doubt *that*;—you—you!" The boy's anguish was too great for his frame; he fell suddenly back into Audley's arms; he had broken a blood-vessel. For several days he was in great danger; but his eyes were constantly fixed on Audley's, with wistful, intense gaze. "Tell me," he muttered, at the risk of reopening the ruptured veins, and of the instant loss of life—"tell me—you did not mean *that!* Tell me you have no cause to think she loved another—*was* another's!"

"Hush, hush—no cause—none—none. I meant

but to comfort you, as I thought—fool that I was—that is all!" cried the miserable friend. And from that hour Audley gave up the idea of righting himself in his own eyes, and submitted still to be the living lie—he, the haughty gentleman!

Now, while Harley was still very weak and suffering, Mr Dale came to London and called on Egerton. The curate, in promising secresy to Mrs Avenel, had made one condition, that it should not be to the positive injury of Nora's living son. What if Nora were married after all? And would it not be right, at least, to learn the name of the child's father? Some day he might need a father. Mrs Avenel was obliged to content herself with these reservations. However, she implored Mr Dale not to make inquiries. What could they do? If Nora were married, her husband would naturally, of his own accord, declare himself; if seduced and forsaken, it would but disgrace her memory (now saved from stain) to discover the father to a child of whose very existence the world as yet knew nothing. These arguments perplexed the good curate. But Jane Fairfield had a sanguine belief in her sister's innocence; and all her suspicions naturally pointed to Lord L'Estrange. So, indeed, perhaps, did Mrs Avenel's, though she never owned them. Of the correctness of these suspicions Mr Dale was fully convinced;—the young lord's admiration, Lady Lansmere's fears, had been too evident to one who had often visited at the Park—Harley's abrupt departure just before Nora's return home—Egerton's sudden resignation of the

borough before even opposition was declared, in order to rejoin his friend, the very day of Nora's death—all confirmed his ideas that Harley was the betrayer or the husband. Perhaps there might have been a secret marriage—possibly abroad—since Harley wanted some years of his majority. He would, at least, try to see and to sound Lord L'Estrange. Prevented this interview by Harley's illness, the curate resolved to ascertain how far he could penetrate into the mystery by a conversation with Egerton. There was much in the grave repute which the latter had acquired, and the singular and pre-eminent character for truth and honour with which it was accompanied, that made the curate resolve upon this step. Accordingly, he saw Egerton, meaning only diplomatically to extract from the new member for Lansmere what might benefit the family of the voters who had given him his majority of two.

He began by mentioning, as a touching fact, how poor John Avenel, bowed down by the loss of his child, and the malady which had crippled his limbs and enfeebled his mind, had still risen from his bed to keep his word. And Audley's emotions seemed to him so earnest and genuine, to show so good a heart, that out by little and little came more; first, his suspicions that poor Nora had been betrayed; then his hopes that there might have been private marriage; and as Audley, with his iron self-command, showed just the proper degree of interest, and no more, he went on, till Audley knew that he had a child.

"Inquire no further!" said the man of the world.

"Respect Mrs Avenel's feelings and wishes, I entreat you; they are the right ones. Leave the rest to me. In my position—I mean as a resident of London—I can quietly and easily ascertain more than you could, and provoke no scandal! If I can right this—this—poor [his voice trembled]—right the lost mother, or the living child—sooner or later you will hear from me; if not, bury this secret where it now rests, in a grave which slander has not reached. But the child—give me the address where it is to be found—in case I succeed in finding the father, and touching his heart."

"Oh, Mr Egerton, may I not say where you may find that father—who he is?"

"Sir!"

"Do not be angry; and, after all, I cannot ask you to betray any confidence which a friend may have placed in you. I know what you men of high honour are to each other—even in sin. No no—I beg pardon; I leave all in your hands. I shall hear from you then!"

"Or if not—why, then, believe that all search is hopeless. My friend! if you mean Lord L'Estrange, he is innocent. I—I—I [the voice faltered]—am convinced of it."

The curate sighed, but made no answer. "Oh, ye men of the world!" thought he. He gave the address which the member for Lansmere had asked for, and went his way, and never heard again from Audley Egerton. He was convinced that the man who had

shown such deep feeling had failed in his appeal to Harley's conscience, or had judged it best to leave Nora's name in peace, and her child to her own relations and the care of Heaven.

Harley L'Estrange, scarcely yet recovered, hastened to join our armies on the Continent, and seek the Death which, like its half-brother, rarely comes when we call it.

As soon as Harley was gone, Egerton went to the village to which Mr Dale had directed him, to seek for Nora's child. But here he was led into a mistake which materially affected the tenor of his own life, and Leonard's future destinies. Mrs Fairfield had been naturally ordered by her mother to take another name in the village to which she had gone with the two infants, so that her connection with the Avenel family might not be traced, to the provocation of inquiry and gossip. The grief and excitement through which she had gone, dried the source of nutriment in her breast. She put Nora's child out to nurse at the house of a small farmer, at a little distance from the village, and moved from her first lodging to be nearer to the infant. Her own child was so sickly and ailing, that she could not bear to intrust it to the care of another. She tried to bring it up by hand; and the poor child soon pined away and died. She and Mark could not endure the sight of their baby's grave; they hastened to return to Hazeldean, and took Leonard with them. From that time Leonard passed for the son they had lost.

When Egerton arrived at the village, and inquired

for the person whose address had been given to him, he was referred to the cottage in which she had last lodged, and was told that she had been gone some days—the day after her child was buried. Her child buried! Egerton stayed to inquire no more; thus he heard nothing of the infant that had been put out to nurse. He walked slowly into the churchyard, and stood for some minutes gazing on the small new mound; then, pressing his hand on the heart to which all emotion had been forbidden, he re-entered his chaise and returned to London. The sole reason for acknowledging his marriage seemed to him now removed. Nora's name had escaped reproach. Even had his painful position with regard to Harley not constrained him to preserve his secret, there was every motive to the World's wise and haughty son not to acknowledge a derogatory and foolish marriage, now that none lived whom concealment could wrong.

Audley mechanically resumed his former life,—sought to resettle his thoughts on the grand objects of ambitious men. His poverty still pressed on him; his pecuniary debt to Harley stung and galled his peculiar sense of honour. He saw no way to clear his estates, to repay his friend, but by some rich alliance. Dead to love, he faced this prospect first with repugnance, then with apathetic indifference. Levy, of whose treachery towards himself and Nora he was unaware, still held over him the power that the money-lender never loses over the man that has owed, owes, or may owe again. Levy was ever urging him to propose to the rich Miss Leslie;

—Lady Lansmere, willing to atone, as she thought, for his domestic loss, urged the same ;—Harley, influenced by his mother, wrote from the Continent to the same effect.

"Manage it as you will," at last said Egerton to Levy, "so that I am not a wife's pensioner."

"Propose for me if you will," he said to Lady Lansmere—"I cannot woo—I cannot talk of love."

Somehow or other the marriage, with all its rich advantages to the ruined gentleman, was thus made up. And Egerton, as we have seen, was the polite and dignified husband before the world—married to a woman who adored him. It is the common fate of men like him to be loved too well!

On her death-bed his heart was touched by his wife's melancholy reproach—"Nothing I could do has ever made you love me!" "It is true," answered Audley, with tears in his voice and eyes—"Nature gave me but a small fund of what women like you call 'love,' and I lavished it all away." And he then told her, though with reserve, some portion of his former history ; and that soothed her ; for when she saw that he had loved, and *could* grieve, she caught a glimpse of the human heart she *had* not seen before. She died, forgiving him and blessing.

Audley's spirits were much affected by this new loss. He inly resolved never to marry again. He had a vague thought at first of retrenching his expenditure, and making young Randal Leslie his heir. But when he first saw the clever Eton boy, his feelings did not

warm to him, though his intellect appreciated Randal's quick, keen talents. He contented himself with resolving to push the boy;—to do what was merely just to the distant kinsman of his late wife. Always careless and lavish in money matters, generous and princely, not from the delight of serving others, but from a *grand seigneur's* sentiment of what was due to himself and his station, Audley had a mournful excuse for the lordly waste of the large fortune at his control. The morbid functions of the heart had become organic disease. True, he might live many years, and die at last of some other complaint in the course of nature; but the progress of the disease would quicken with all emotional excitement;—he might die suddenly—any day—in the very prime, and, seemingly, in the full vigour of his life. And the only physician in whom he confided what he wished to keep concealed from the world (for ambitious men would fain be thought immortal), told him frankly that it was improbable that, with the wear and tear of political strife and action, he could advance far into middle age. Therefore, no son of his succeeding—his nearest relations all wealthy—Egerton resigned himself to his constitutional disdain of money; he could look into no affairs, provided the balance in his banker's hands were such as became the munificent commoner. All else he left to his steward and to Levy. Levy grew rapidly rich—very, very rich—and the steward thrived.

The usurer continued to possess a determined hold over the imperious great man. He knew Audley's

secret; he could reveal that secret to Harley. And the one soft and tender side of the statesman's nature—the sole part of him not dipped in the ninefold Styx of practical prosaic life, which renders man so invulnerable to affection—was his remorseful love for the school-friend whom he still deceived.

Here, then, you have the key to the locked chambers of Audley Egerton's character, the fortified castle of his mind. The envied minister—the joyless man;—the oracle on the economies of an empire—the prodigal in a usurer's hands; the august, high-crested gentleman, to whom princes would refer for the casuistry of honour—the culprit, trembling lest the friend he best loved on earth should detect his lie! Wrap thyself in the decent veil that the Arts or the Graces weave for thee, O Human Nature! It is only the statue of marble whose nakedness the eye can behold without shame and offence!

CHAPTER XIX.

Of the narrative just placed before the reader, it is clear that Leonard could gather only desultory fragments. He could but see that his ill-fated mother had been united to a man she had loved with surpassing tenderness; had been led to suspect that the marriage was fraudulent; had gone abroad in despair, returned repentant and hopeful; had gleaned some intelligence that her lover was about to be married to another, and there the manuscript closed with the blisters left on the page by agonising tears. The mournful end of Nora—her lonely return to die under the roof of her parents—this he had learned before from the narrative of Dr Morgan.

But even the name of her supposed husband was not revealed. Of him Leonard could form no conjecture, except that he was evidently of higher rank than Nora. Harley L'Estrange seemed clearly indicated in the early boy-lover. If so, Harley must know all that was left dark to Leonard, and to him Leonard resolved to confide the manuscripts. With this resolution he left the cottage, resolving to return and attend the funeral obsequies of his departed friend. Mrs Goodyer will-

ingly permitted him to take away the papers she had lent to him, and added to them the packet which had been addressed to Mrs Bertram from the Continent.

Musing in anxious gloom over the record he had read, Leonard entered London on foot, and bent his way towards Harley's hotel; when, just as he had crossed into Bond Street, a gentleman in company with Baron Levy, and who seemed, by the flush on his brow and the sullen tone of his voice, to have had rather an irritating colloquy with the fashionable usurer, suddenly caught sight of Leonard, and, abruptly quitting Levy, seized the young man by the arm.

"Excuse me, sir," said the gentleman, looking hard into Leonard's face; "but unless these sharp eyes of mine are mistaken, which they seldom are, I see a nephew whom, perhaps, I behaved to rather too harshly, but who still has no right to forget Richard Avenel."

"My dear uncle," exclaimed Leonard, "this is indeed a joyful surprise; at a time, too, when I needed joy! No; I have never forgotten your kindness, and always regretted our estrangement."

"That is well said; give us your fist again. Let me look at you—quite the gentleman, I declare!—still so good-looking too. We Avenels always were a handsome family. Good-by, Baron Levy. Need not wait for me; I am not going to run away. I shall see you again."

"But," whispered Levy, who had followed Avenel across the street, and eyed Leonard with a quick, curious, searching glance—"but it must be as I say

with regard to the borough; or (to be plain) you must cash the bills on the day they are due."

"Very well, sir—very well. So you think to put the screw upon me, as if I were a poor little householder. I understand—my money or my borough?"

"Exactly so," said the Baron with a soft smile.

"You shall hear from me." (Aside, as Levy strolled away)—"D——d tarnation rascal!"

Dick Avenel then linked his arm in his Nephew's, and strove for some minutes to forget his own troubles, in the indulgence of that curiosity in the affairs of another which was natural to him, and in this instance increased by the real affection which he had felt for Leonard. But still his curiosity remained unsatisfied; for long before Leonard could overcome his habitual reluctance to speak of his success in literature, Dick's mind wandered back to his rival at Screwstown and the curse of "over-competition,"—to the bills which Levy had discounted, in order to enable Dick to meet the crushing force of a capitalist larger than himself—and the "tarnation rascal" who now wished to obtain two seats at Lansmere, one for Randal Leslie, one for a rich Nabob whom Levy had just caught as a client; and Dick, though willing to aid Leslie, had a mind to the other seat for himself. Therefore Dick soon broke in upon the hesitating confessions of Leonard, with exclamations far from pertinent to the subject, and rather for the sake of venting his own griefs and resentment, than with any idea that the sympathy or advice of his nephew could serve him.

"Well, well," said Dick, "another time for your history. I see you have thrived, and that is enough for the present. Very odd; but just now I can only think of myself. I'm in a regular fix, sir. Screwstown is not the respectable Screwstown that you remember it —all demoralised and turned topsy-turvy by a demoniacal monster capitalist, with steam-engines that might bring the falls of Niagara into your back parlour, sir! And as if that was not enough to destroy and drive into almighty shivers a decent fair-play Britisher like myself, I hear he is just in treaty for some patent infernal invention that will make his engines do twice as much work with half as many hands! That's the way those unfeeling ruffians increase our poor-rates! But I'll get up a riot against him—I will! Don't talk to me of the law! What the devil is the good of the law if it don't protect a man's industry—a *liberal* man, too, like me!" Here Dick burst into a storm of vituperation against the rotten old country in general, and Mr Dyce, the monster capitalist of Screwstown, in particular.

Leonard started; for Dick now named, in that monster capitalist, the very person who was in treaty for Leonard's own mechanical improvement on the steam-engine.

"Stop, uncle—stop! Why, then, if this man were to buy the contrivance you speak of, it would injure you?"

"Injure me, sir! I should be a bankrupt—that is, if it succeeded; but I daresay it is all a humbug."

"No, it *will* succeed—I'll answer for that!"

"You! You have seen it?"

"Why, I invented it."

Dick hastily withdrew his arm from Leonard's.

"Serpent's tooth!" he said, falteringly, "so it is you, whom I warmed at my hearth, who are to ruin Richard Avenel?"

"No—but to save him! Come into the city and look at my model. If you like it, the patent shall be yours!"

"Cab—cab—cab," cried Dick Avenel, stopping a "Hansom;" "jump in Leonard—jump in. I'll buy your patent—that is, if it be worth a straw; and as for payment——"

"Payment! Don't talk of that!"

"Well, I won't," said Dick, mildly; "for 'tis not the topic of conversation I should choose myself, just at present. And as for that black-whiskered alligator, the Baron, let me first get out of those rambustious, unchristian, filbert-shaped claws of his, and then—But jump in—jump in—and tell the man where to drive!"

A very brief inspection of Leonard's invention sufficed to show Richard Avenel how invaluable it would be to him. Armed with a patent, of which the certain effects in the increase of power and diminution of labour were obvious to any practical man, Avenel felt that he should have no difficulty in obtaining such advances of money as he required, whether to alter his engines, meet the bills discounted by Levy, or carry on the war with the monster capitalist. It might be necessary to admit into partnership some other monster capitalist—What then? Any partner better than Levy. A bright idea struck him.

"If I can just terrify and whop that infernal intruder on my own ground, for a few months, he may offer, himself, to enter into partnership—make the two concerns a joint-stock friendly combination, and then we shall flog the world."

His gratitude to Leonard became so lively, that Dick offered to bring his nephew in for Lansmere instead of himself; and when Leonard declined the offer, exclaimed, "Well, then, any friend of yours; I'm all for reform against those high and mighty right honourable boroughmongers; and what with loans and mortgages on the small householders, and a long course of 'Free and Easies' with the independent freemen, I carry one seat certain, perhaps both seats of the town of Lansmere, in my breeches-pocket." Dick, then, appointing an interview with Leonard at his lawyer's, to settle the transfer of the invention, upon terms which he declared "should be honourable to both parties," hurried off, to search amongst his friends in the city for some monster capitalist, who might be induced to extricate him from the jaws of Levy, and the engines of his rival at Screwstown. "Mullins is the man, if I can but catch him," said Dick. "You have heard of Mullins?—A wonderful great man; you should see his nails: he never cuts them! Three millions, at least, he has scraped together with those nails of his, sir. And in this rotten old country, a man must have nails a yard long to fight with a devil like Levy!—Good-bye—good-*bye*,—GOOD-bye, my DEAR nephew!"

CHAPTER XX.

HARLEY L'ESTRANGE was seated alone in his apartments. He had just put down a volume of some favourite classic author, and he was resting his hand firmly clenched upon the book. Ever since Harley's return to England, there had been a perceptible change in the expression of his countenance, even in the very bearing and attitudes of his elastic youthful figure. But this change had been more marked since that last interview with Helen which has been recorded. There was a compressed, resolute firmness in the lips—a decided character in the brow. To the indolent careless grace of his movements had succeeded a certain indescribable energy, as quiet and self-collected as that which distinguished the determined air of Audley Egerton himself. In fact, if you could have looked into his heart, you would have seen that Harley was, for the first time, making a strong effort over his passions and his humours: that the whole man was nerving himself to a sense of duty. "No," he muttered—"no—I will think only of Helen; I will think only of real life! And what (were I not engaged to another) would that dark-eyed Italian girl be to me?—What a mere fool's

fancy is this! I love again—I, who, through all the fair spring of my life, have clung with such faith to a memory and a grave! Come, come, come, Harley L'Estrange, act thy part as man amongst men, at last! Accept regard; dream no more of passion. Abandon false ideals. Thou art no poet—why deem that life itself can be a poem?"

The door opened, and the Austrian Prince, whom Harley had interested in the cause of Violante's father, entered with the familiar step of a friend.

"Have you discovered those documents, yet?" said the Prince. "I must now return to Vienna within a few days. And unless you can arm me with some tangible proof of Peschiera's ancient treachery, or some more unanswerable excuse for his noble kinsman, I fear that there is no other hope for the exile's recall to his country, than what lies in the hateful option of giving his daughter to his perfidious foe."

"Alas!" said Harley, "as yet all researches have been in vain; and I know not what other steps to take, without arousing Peschiera's vigilance, and setting his crafty brains at work to counteract us. My poor friend, then, must rest contented with exile. To give Violante to the Count were dishonour. But I shall soon be married; soon have a home, not quite unworthy of their due rank, to offer both to father and to child."

"Would the future Lady L'Estrange feel no jealousy of a guest so fair as you tell me this young signorina is? And would you be in no danger yourself, my poor friend?"

"Pooh!" said Harley, colouring. "My fair guest would have *two* fathers; that is all. Pray do not jest on a thing so grave as honour."

Again the door opened, and Leonard appeared.

"Welcome," cried Harley, pleased to be no longer alone under the Prince's penetrating eye—"welcome. This is the noble friend who shares our interest for Riccabocca, and who could serve him so well, if we could but discover the document of which I have spoken to you."

"It is here," said Leonard simply; "may it be all that you require!"

Harley eagerly grasped at the packet, which had been sent from Italy to the supposed Mrs Bertram, and, leaning his face on his hand, rapidly hurried through the contents.

"Hurrah!" he cried at last, with his face lighted up, and a boyish toss of his right hand. "Look, look, Prince, here are Peschiera's own letters to his kinsman's wife; his avowal of what he calls his 'patriotic designs;' his entreaties to her to induce her husband to share them. Look, look, how he wields his influence over the woman he had once wooed; look how artfully he combats her objections; see how reluctant our friend was to stir, till wife and kinsman both united to urge him."

"It is enough—quite enough," exclaimed the Prince, looking at the passages in Peschiera's letters which Harley pointed out to him.

"No, it is not enough," shouted Harley, as he con-

tinued to read the letters with his rapid sparkling eyes. "More still! O villain, doubly damned! Here, after our friend's flight, here is Peschiera's avowal of guilty passion; here, he swears that he had intrigued to ruin his benefactor, in order to pollute the home that had sheltered him. Ah! see how she answers; thank Heaven her own eyes were opened at last, and she scorned him before she died. She was innocent! I said so! Violante's mother was pure. Poor lady! this moves me. Has your Emperor the heart of a man?"

"I know enough of our Emperor," answered the Prince, warmly, "to know that the moment these papers reach him, Peschiera is ruined, and your friend is restored to his honours. You will live to see the daughter, to whom you would have given a child's place at your hearth, the wealthiest heiress of Italy—the bride of some noble lover, with rank only below the supremacy of kings!"

"Ah!" said Harley, in a sharp accent, and turning very pale—"ah, I shall not see her that! I shall never visit Italy again! never see her more—never, after she has once quitted this climate of cold iron cares and formal duties—never, never!" He turned his head for a moment, and then came with quick step to Leonard. "But you, O happy poet! No Ideal can ever be lost to you. You are independent of real life. Would that I were a poet!" He smiled sadly.

"You would not say so, perhaps, my dear lord," answered Leonard, with equal sadness, "if you knew how little what you call 'the Ideal' replaces to a poet

the loss of one affection in the genial human world. Independent of real life! Alas! no. And I have here the confessions of a true poet-soul, which I will entreat you to read at leisure; and when you have read, say if you would still be a poet!"

He took forth Nora's manuscripts, as he spoke.

"Place them yonder, in my *escritoire*, Leonard; I will read them later."

"Do so, and with heed; for to me there is much here that involves my own life—much that is still a mystery, and which I think you can unravel!"

"I!" exclaimed Harley; and he was moving towards the *escritoire*, in a drawer of which Leonard had carefully deposited the papers, when once more, but this time violently, the door was thrown open, and Giacomo rushed into the room, accompanied by Lady Lansmere.

"Oh, my lord, my lord!" cried Giacomo, in Italian, "the signorina! the signorina!—Violante!"

"What of her? Mother, mother! what of her? Speak, speak!"

"She has gone—left our house!"

"Left! No, no," cried Giacomo. "She must have been deceived or forced away. The Count! the Count! Oh, my good lord, save her as you once saved her father!"

"Hold!" cried Harley. "Give me your arm, mother. A *second* such blow in life is beyond the strength of man—at least it is beyond mine. So, so!—I am better now! Thank you, mother. Stand back, all of you—give me air. So the Count has triumphed, and Violante has fled with him! Explain all—I can bear it!"

BOOK XII.

INITIAL CHAPTER.

WHEREIN THE CAXTON FAMILY REAPPEAR.

"AGAIN," quoth my father—"again behold US! We who greeted the commencement of your narrative, who absented ourselves in the mid-course when we could but obstruct the current of events, and jostle personages more important—we now gather round the close. Still, as the chorus to the drama, we circle round the altar with the solemn but dubious chant which prepares the audience for the completion of the appointed destinies; though still, ourselves, unaware how the skein is to be unravelled, and where the shears are to descend."

So there they stood, the Family of Caxton—all grouping round me—all eager officiously to question—some over-anxious prematurely to criticise.

"Violante can't have voluntarily gone off with that horrid Count," said my mother; "but perhaps she

was deceived, like Eugenia by Mr Bellamy, in the novel of 'CAMILLA.'"

"Ha!" said my father, "and in that case it is time yet to steal a hint from Clarissa Harlowe, and make Violante die less of a broken heart than a sullied honour. She is one of those girls who ought to be killed! All things about her forebode an early tomb!"

"Dear, dear!" cried Mrs Caxton, "I hope not!"

"Pooh, brother," said the Captain, "we have had enough of the tomb in the history of poor Nora. The whole story grows out of a grave, and if to a grave it must return—if, Pisistratus, you must kill somebody, kill Levy."

"Or the Count," said my mother, with unusual truculence.

"Or Randal Leslie," said Squills. "I should like to have a *post-mortem* cast of his head—it would be an instructive study."

Here there was a general confusion of tongues, all present conspiring to bewilder the unfortunate author with their various and discordant counsels how to wind up his story and dispose of his characters.

"Silence!" cried Pisistratus, clapping his hands to both ears. "I can no more alter the fate allotted to each of the personages whom you honour with your interest than I can change your own; like you, they must go where events lead them, urged on by their own characters and the agencies of others. Providence so pervadingly governs the universe, that you cannot strike it even out of a book. The author may beget

a character, but the moment the character comes into action, it escapes from his hands—plays its own part, and fulfils its own inevitable doom."

"Besides," said Mr Squills, "it is easy to see, from the phrenological development of the organs in those several heads which Pisistratus has allowed us to examine, that we have seen no creations of mere fiction, but living persons, whose true history has set in movement their various bumps of Amativeness, Constructiveness, Acquisitiveness, Ideality, Wonder, Comparison, &c. They must act, and they must end, according to the influences of their crania. Thus we find in Randal Leslie the predominant organs of Constructiveness, Secretiveness, Comparison, and Eventuality — while Benevolence, Conscientiousness, Adhesiveness, are utterly *nil*. Now, to divine how such a man must end, we must first see what is the general composition of the society in which he moves,—in short, what other gases are brought into contact with his phlogiston. As to Leonard, and Harley, and Audley Egerton, surveying them phrenologically, I should say that——"

"Hush!" said my father, "Pisistratus has dipped his pen in the ink, and it seems to me easier for the wisest man that ever lived to account for what others have done, than to predict what they should do. Phrenologists discovered that Mr Thurtell had a very fine organ of Conscientiousness, yet, somehow or other, that erring personage contrived to knock the brains out of his friend's organ of Individuality. Therefore I rise to propose a Resolution—that this meeting be

adjourned till Pisistratus has completed his narrative; and we shall then have the satisfaction of knowing that it ought, according to every principle of nature, science, and art, to have been completed differently. Why should we deprive ourselves of that pleasure?"

"I second the motion," said the Captain; "but if Levy be not hanged, I shall say that there is an end of all poetical justice."

"Take care of poor Helen," said Blanche, tenderly; "not that I would have you forget Violante."

"Pish! and sit down, or they shall both die old maids."

Frightened at that threat, Blanche, with a deprecating look, drew her stool quietly near me, as if to place her two *protégées* in an atmosphere mesmerised to matrimonial attractions; and my mother set hard to work—at a new frock for the baby. Unsoftened by these undue female influences, Pisistratus wrote on at the dictation of the relentless Fates. His pen was of iron, and his heart was of granite. He was as insensible to the existence of wife and baby, as if he had never paid a house-bill, nor rushed from a nursery at the sound of an infant squall. O blessed privilege of Authorship!

"O testudinis aureæ
Dulcem quæ strepitum, Pieri, temperas!
O mutis quoque piscibus
Donatura cycni, si libeat, sonum!" *

* O Muse, who dost temper the sweet sound of the golden shell of the tortoise, and couldst also give, were it needed, to silent fishes the song of the swan!

CHAPTER II.

It is necessary to go somewhat back in the course of this narrative, and account to the reader for the disappearance of Violante.

It may be remembered that Peschiera, scared by the sudden approach of Lord L'Estrange, had little time for farther words to the young Italian than those which expressed his intention to renew the conference, and press for her decision. But the next day, when he re-entered the garden secretly and stealthily, as before, Violante did not appear. And after watching round the precincts till dusk, the Count retreated, with an indignant conviction that his arts had failed to enlist on his side either the heart or the imagination of his intended victim. He began now to revolve, and to discuss with Levy, the possibilities of one of those bold and violent measures, which were favoured by his reckless daring and desperate condition. But Levy treated with such just ridicule any suggestion to abstract Violante by force from Lord Lansmere's house, —so scouted the notions of nocturnal assault, with the devices of scaling windows and rope-ladders, that the Count reluctantly abandoned that romance of villany

so unsuited to our sober capital, and which would no doubt have terminated in his capture by the police, with the prospect of committal to the House of Correction.

Levy himself found his invention at fault, and Randal Leslie was called into consultation. The usurer had contrived that Randal's schemes of fortune and advancement were so based upon Levy's aid and connivance, that the young man, with all his desire rather to make instruments of other men, than to be himself their instrument, found his superior intellect as completely a slave to Levy's more experienced craft, as ever subtle Genius of air was subject to the vulgar Sorcerer of earth.

His acquisition of the ancestral acres,—his anticipated seat in Parliament,—his chance of ousting Frank from the heritage of Hazeldean, were all as strings that pulled him to and fro, like the puppet in the sleek filbert-nailed fingers of the smiling showman, who could exhibit him to the admiration of a crowd, or cast him away into dust and lumber.

Randal gnawed his lip in the sullen wrath of a man who bides his hour of future emancipation, and lent his brain to the hire of the present servitude, in mechanical acquiescence. The inherent superiority of the profound young schemer became instantly apparent over the courage of Peschiera, and the practised wit of the Baron.

"Your sister," said Randal to the former, "must be the active agent in the first and most difficult part of your enterprise. Violante cannot be taken by force

from Lord Lansmere's—she must be induced to leave it with her own consent. A female is needed here. Woman can best decoy woman."

"Admirably said," quoth the Count; "but Beatrice has grown restive, and though her dowry, and therefore her very marriage with that excellent young Hazeldean, depend on my own alliance with my fair kinswoman, she has grown so indifferent to my success, that I dare not reckon on her aid. Between you and me, though she was once very eager to be married, she now seems to shrink from the notion; and I have no other hold over her."

"Has she not seen some one, and lately, whom she prefers to poor Frank?"

"I suspect that she has; but I know not whom, unless it be that detested L'Estrange."

"Ah—well, well. Interfere with her no further yourself, but have all in readiness to quit England, as you had before proposed, as soon as Violante be in your power."

"All is in readiness," said the Count. "Levy has agreed to purchase a famous sailing-vessel of one of his clients. I have engaged a score or so of determined outcasts, accustomed to the sea—Genoese, Corsicans, Sardinians—ex-Carbonari of the best sort,—no silly patriots, but liberal cosmopolitans, who have iron at the disposal of any man's gold. I have a priest to perform the nuptial service, and deaf to any fair lady's "No." Once at sea, and wherever I land, Violante will lean on my arm as Countess of Peschiera."

"But Violante," said Randal, doggedly, determined not to yield to the disgust with which the Count's audacious cynicism filled even him—"but Violante cannot be removed in broad daylight at once to such a vessel, nor from a quarter so populous as that in which your sister resides."

"I have thought of that too," said the Count; "my emissaries have found me a house close by the river, and safe for our purpose as the dungeons of Venice."

"I wish not to know all this," answered Randal, quickly; "you will instruct Madame di Negra where to take Violante—my task limits itself to the fair inventions that belong to intellect; what belongs to force is not in my province. I will go at once to your sister, whom I think I can influence more effectually than you can; though later I may give you a hint to guard against the chance of her remorse. Meanwhile as, the moment Violante disappears, suspicion would fall upon you, show yourself constantly in public, surrounded by your friends. Be able to account for every hour of your time——"

"An *alibi?*" interrupted the *ci-devant* solicitor.

"Exactly so, Baron. Complete the purchase of the vessel, and let the Count man it as he proposes. I will communicate with you both as soon as I can put you into action. To-day I shall have much to do; it will be done."

As Randal left the room Levy followed him.

"What you propose to do will be well done, no doubt," quoth the usurer, linking his arm in Randal's;

"but take care that you don't get yourself into a scrape, so as to damage your character. I have great hopes of you in public life; and in public life character is necessary—that is, so far as honour is concerned."

"I damage my character!—and for a Count Peschiera!" said Randal, opening his eyes. "I! What do you take me for?"

The Baron let go his hold.

"This boy ought to rise very high," said he to himself, as he turned back to the Count.

CHAPTER III.

RANDAL'S acute faculty of comprehension had long since surmised the truth that Beatrice's views and temper of mind had been strangely and suddenly altered by some such revolution as passion only can effect; that pique or disappointment had mingled with the motive which had induced her to accept the hand of his rash young kinsman; and that, instead of the resigned indifference with which she might at one time have contemplated any marriage that could free her from a position that perpetually galled her pride, it was now with a repugnance, visible to Randal's keen eye, that she shrank from the performance of that pledge which Frank had so dearly bought. The temptations which the Count could hold out to her to become his accomplice in designs of which the fraud and perfidy would revolt her better nature, had ceased to be of avail. A dowry had grown valueless, since it would but hasten the nuptials from which she recoiled. Randal felt that he could not secure her aid, except by working on a passion so turbulent as to confound her judgment. Such a passion he recognised in jealousy. He had once doubted if Harley were the object of her love; yet, after all,

was it not probable? He knew, at least, of no one else to suspect. If so, he had but to whisper, "Violante is your rival. Violante removed, your beauty may find its natural effect; if not, you are an Italian, and you will be at least avenged. He saw still more reason to suppose that Lord L'Estrange was indeed the one by whom he could rule Beatrice, since, the last time he had seen her, she had questioned him with much eagerness as to the family of Lord Lansmere, especially as to the female part of it. Randal had then judged it prudent to avoid speaking of Violante, and feigned ignorance; but promised to ascertain all particulars by the time he next saw the Marchesa. It was the warmth with which she had thanked him, that had set his busy mind at work to conjecture the cause of her curiosity, so earnestly aroused, and to ascribe that cause to jealousy. If Harley loved Violante (as Randal himself had before supposed), the little of passion that the young man admitted to himself was enlisted in aid of Peschiera's schemes. For though Randal did not love Violante, he cordially disliked L'Estrange, and would have gone as far to render that dislike vindictive as a cold reasoner, intent upon worldly fortunes, will ever suffer mere hate to influence him.

"At the worst," thought Randal, "if it be not Harley, touch the chord of jealousy, and its vibration will direct me right."

Thus soliloquising, he arrived at Madame di Negra's.

Now, in reality, the Marchesa's inquiries as to Lord Lansmere's family had their source in the misguided,

restless, despairing interest with which she still clung to the image of the young poet, whom Randal had no reason to suspect. That interest had become yet more keen from the impatient misery she had felt ever since she had plighted herself to another. A wild hope that she might yet escape—a vague regretful thought that she had been too hasty in dismissing Leonard from her presence—that she ought rather to have courted his friendship, and contended against her unknown rival, at times drew her wayward mind wholly from the future to which she had consigned herself. And, to do her justice, though her sense of duty was so defective, and the principles which should have guided her conduct were so lost to her sight, still her feelings towards the generous Hazeldean were not so hard and blunted but what her own ingratitude added to her torment; and it seemed as if the sole atonement she could make to him was to find an excuse to withdraw her promise, and save him from herself. She had caused Leonard's steps to be watched; she had found that he visited at Lord Lansmere's; that he had gone there often, and stayed there long. She had learned in the neighbourhood that Lansmere had one or two young female guests staying with her. Surely this was the attraction—here was the rival!

Randal found Beatrice in a state of mind that favoured his purpose. And first turning his conversation on Harley, and noting that her countenance did not change, by little and little he drew forth her secret.

Then said Randal, gravely, "If one whom you honour with a tender thought visits at Lord Lansmere's house, you have, indeed, cause to fear for yourself, to hope for your brother's success in the object which has brought him to England—for a girl of surpassing beauty is a guest in Lord Lansmere's house; and I will now tell you that that girl is she whom Count Peschiera would make his bride."

As Randal thus spoke, and saw how his listener's brow darkened and her eye flashed, he felt that his accomplice was secured. Violante! Had not Leonard spoken of Violante, and with such praise? Had not his boyhood been passed under her eyes? Who but Violante could be the rival? Beatrice's abrupt exclamations, after a moment's pause, revealed to Randal the advantage he had gained. And partly by rousing her jealousy into revenge—partly by flattering her love with assurances that, if Violante were fairly removed from England,—were the wife of Count Peschiera—it would be impossible that Leonard could remain insensible to her own attractions—that he, Randal, would undertake to free her honourably from her engagement to Frank Hazeldean, and obtain from her brother the acquittal of the debt which had first fettered her hand to that confiding suitor—he did not quit the Marchesa until she had not only promised to do all that Randal might suggest, but impetuously urged him to mature his plans, and hasten the hour to accomplish them. Randal then walked some minutes musing and slow along the streets,

revolving the next meshes in his elaborate and most subtle web. And here his craft luminously devised its masterpiece.

It was necessary, during any interval that might elapse between Violante's disappearance and her departure from England, in order to divert suspicion from Peschiera (who might otherwise be detained), that some cause for her voluntary absence from Lord Lansmere's should be at least assignable; it was still more necessary that Randal himself should stand wholly clear from any surmise that he could have connived at the Count's designs, even should their actual perpetrator be discovered or conjectured. To effect these objects, Randal hastened to Norwood, and obtained an interview with Riccabocca. In seeming agitation and alarm, he informed the exile that he had reason to know that Peschiera had succeeded in obtaining a secret interview with Violante, and he feared had made a certain favourable impression on her mind; and speaking as if with the jealousy of a lover, he entreated Riccabocca to authorise Randal's direct proposals to Violante, and to require her consent to their immediate nuptials.

The poor Italian was confounded with the intelligence conveyed to him; and his almost superstitious fears of his brilliant enemy, conjoined with his opinion of the susceptibility to outward attractions common to all the female sex, made him not only implicitly credit, but even exaggerate, the dangers that Randal intimated. The idea of his daughter's marriage with Randal, towards which he had lately cooled, he now gratefully welcomed.

But his first natural suggestion was to go, or send, for Violante, and bring her to his own house. This, however, Randal artfully opposed.

"Alas! I know," said he, "that Peschiera has discovered your retreat; and surely she would be far less safe here than where she is now!"

"But, *diavolo!* you say the man has seen her where she is now, in spite of all Lady Lansmere's promises and Harley's precautions."

"True. Of this Peschiera boasted to me. He effected it not, of course, openly, but in some disguise. I am sufficiently, however, in his confidence—(any man may be that with so audacious a braggart)—to deter him from renewing his attempt for some days. Meanwhile I or yourself will have discovered some surer home than this, to which you can remove, and then will be the proper time to take back your daughter. And for the present, if you will send by me a letter to enjoin her to receive me as her future bridegroom, it will necessarily divert all thought at once from the Count; I shall be able to detect, by the manner in which she receives me, how far the Count has overstated the effect he pretends to have produced. You can give me also a letter to Lady Lansmere, to prevent your daughter coming hither. O, sir, do not reason with me. Have indulgence for my lover's fears. Believe that I advise for the best. Have I not the keenest interest to do so?"

Like many a man who is wise enough with pen and paper before him, and plenty of time wherewith to get up his wisdom, Riccabocca was flurried, nervous, and

confused, when that wisdom was called upon for any ready exertion. From the tree of knowledge he had taken grafts enough to serve for a forest; but the whole forest could not spare him a handy walking-stick. The great folio of the dead Machiavelli lay useless before him —the living Machiavelli of daily life stood all puissant by his side. The Sage was as supple to the schemer as the Clairvoyant is to the Mesmerist. And the lean, slight fingers of Randal actually dictated almost the very words that Riccabocca wrote to his child and her hostess.

The philosopher would have liked to consult his wife; but he was ashamed to confess that weakness. Suddenly he remembered Harley, and said, as Randal took up the letters which Riccabocca had indited—

"There—that will give us time; and I will send to Lord L'Estrange and talk to him."

"My noble friend," replied Randal, mournfully, "may I entreat you not to see Lord L'Estrange until at least I have pleaded my cause to your daughter—until, indeed, she is no longer under his father's roof."

"And why?"

"Because I presume that you are sincere when you deign to receive me as a son-in-law, and because I am sure that Lord L'Estrange would hear with distaste of your disposition in my favour. Am I not right?"

Riccabocca was silent.

"And though his arguments would fail with a man of your honour and discernment, they might have more effect on the young mind of your child. Think, I be-

seech you, the more she is set against me, the more accessible she may be to the arts of Peschiera. Speak not, therefore, I implore you, to Lord L'Estrange till Violante has accepted my hand, or at least until she is again under your charge; otherwise take back your letter —it would be of no avail."

"Perhaps you are right. Certainly Lord L'Estrange is prejudiced against you; or rather, he thinks too much of what I have been—too little of what I am."

"Who can see you, and not do so? I pardon him." After kissing the hand which the exile modestly sought to withdraw from that act of homage, Randal pocketed the letters; and, as if struggling with emotion, rushed from the house.

Now, O curious reader, if thou wilt heedfully observe to what uses Randal Leslie put those letters—what speedy and direct results he drew forth from devices which would seem to an honest simple understanding the most roundabout wire-drawn wastes of invention—I almost fear that in thine admiration for his cleverness, thou mayest half forget thy contempt for his knavery.

But when the head is very full, it does not do to have the heart very empty; there is such a thing as being top-heavy!

CHAPTER IV.

HELEN and Violante had been conversing together, and Helen had obeyed her guardian's injunction, and spoken, though briefly, of her positive engagement to Harley. However much Violante had been prepared for the confidence, however clearly she had divined that engagement, however before persuaded that the dream of her childhood was fled for ever, still the positive truth, coming from Helen's own lips, was attended with that anguish which proves how impossible it is to *prepare* the human heart for the final verdict which slays its future. She did not, however, betray her emotion to Helen's artless eyes; sorrow, deep-seated, is seldom self-betrayed. But, after a little while, she crept away; and, forgetful of Peschiera, of all things that could threaten danger (what danger could harm her more!), she glided from the house, and went her desolate way under the leafless wintry trees. Ever and anon she paused—ever and anon she murmured the same words: "If she loved him, I could be consoled; but she does not! or how could she have spoken to me so calmly! how could her very looks have been so sad! Heartless! —heartless!"

Then there came on her a vehement resentment against poor Helen, that almost took the character of scorn or hate—its excess startled herself. "Am I grown so mean?" she said; and tears that humbled her, rushed to her eyes. "Can so short a time alter one thus? Impossible!"

Randal Leslie rang at the front gate, inquired for Violante, and, catching sight of her form as he walked towards the house, advanced boldly and openly. His voice startled her as she leant against one of the dreary trees, still muttering to herself—forlorn. "I have a letter to you from your father, Signorina," said Randal. "But, before I give it to your hands, some explanation is necessary. Condescend, then, to hear me." Violante shook her head impatiently, and stretched forth her hand for the letter. Randal observed her countenance with his keen, cold, searching eye; but he still withheld the letter, and continued, after a pause—

"I know that you were born to princely fortunes; and the excuse for my addressing you now is, that your birthright is lost to you, at least unless you can consent to a union with the man who has despoiled you of your heritage—a union which your father would deem dishonour to yourself and him. Signorina, I might have presumed to love you; but I should not have named that love, had your father not encouraged me by his assent to my suit."

Violante turned to the speaker, her face eloquent with haughty surprise. Randal met the gaze unmoved. He continued, without warmth, and in the tone of one

who reasons calmly, rather than of one who feels acutely—

"The man of whom I spoke is in pursuit of you. I have cause to believe that this person has already intruded himself upon you. Ah! your countenance owns it; you have seen Peschiera? This house is, then, less safe than your father deemed it. No house is safe for you but a husband's. I offer to you my name—it is a gentleman's; my fortune, which is small; the participation in my hopes of the future, which are large. I place now your father's letter in your hand, and await your answer." Randal bowed slightly, gave the letter to Violante, and retired a few paces.

It was not his object to conciliate Violante's affection, but rather to excite her repugnance, or at least her terror—we must wait to discover why; so he stood apart, seemingly in a kind of self-confident indifference, while the girl read the following letter:—

"My child, receive with favour Mr Leslie. He has my consent to address you as a suitor. Circumstances, of which it is needless now to inform you, render it essential to my very peace and happiness that your marriage should be immediate. In a word, I have given my promise to Mr Leslie, and I confidently leave it to the daughter of my house to redeem the pledge of her anxious and tender father."

The letter dropped from Violante's hand. Randal

approached, and restored it to her. Their eyes met. Violante recoiled.

"I cannot marry you," said she, passionately.

"Indeed!" answered Randal, drily. "Is it because you cannot love me?"

"Yes."

"I did not expect that you would as yet, and I still persist in my suit. I have promised to your father that I would not recede before your first unconsidered refusal."

"I will go to my father at once."

"Does he request you to do so in his letter? Look again. Pardon me, but he foresaw your impetuosity; and I have another note for Lady Lansmere, in which he begs her ladyship not to sanction your return to him (should you so wish) until he come or send for you himself. He will do so whenever your word has redeemed his own."

"And do you dare to talk to me thus, and yet pretend to love me?"

Randal smiled ironically.

"I pretend but to wed you. Love is a subject on which I might have spoken formerly, or may speak hereafter. I give you some little time to consider. When I next call, let me hope that we may fix the day for our wedding."

"Never!"

"You will be, then, the first daughter of your house who disobeyed a father; and you will have this addi-

tional crime that you disobeyed him in his sorrow, his exile, and his fall."

Violante wrung her hands.

"Is there no choice—no escape?"

"I see none for either. Listen to me. I love you, it is true; but it is not for my happiness to marry one who dislikes me, nor for my ambition to connect myself with one whose poverty is greater than my own. I marry but to keep my plighted faith with your father, and to save you from a villain you would hate more than myself, and from whom no walls are a barrier, no laws a defence. One person, indeed, might perhaps have preserved you from the misery you seem to anticipate with me; that person might defeat the plans of your father's foe—effect, it might be, terms which could revoke his banishment and restore his honours; that person is——"

"Lord L'Estrange?"

"Lord L'Estrange!" repeated Randal sharply, and watching her pale parted lips and her changing colour; "Lord L'Estrange! What could he do? Why did you name him?"

Violante turned aside. "He saved my father once;" said she, feelingly.

"And has interfered, and trifled, and promised, Heaven knows what, ever since—yet to what end? Pooh! The person I speak of your father would not consent to see—would not believe if he saw her; yet she is generous, noble—could sympathise with you both. She is the sister of your father's enemy—the

Marchesa di Negra. I am convinced that she has great influence with her brother—that she has known enough of his secrets to awe him into renouncing all designs on yourself; but it is idle now to speak of her."

"No, no," exclaimed Violante. "Tell me where she lives—I will see her."

"Pardon me, I cannot obey you; and, indeed, her own pride is now aroused by your father's unfortunate prejudices against her. It is too late to count upon her aid. You turn from me—my presence is unwelcome. I rid you of it now. But welcome or unwelcome, later you must endure it—and for life."

Randal again bowed with formal ceremony, walked towards the house, and asked for Lady Lansmere. The Countess was at home. Randal delivered Riccabocca's note, which was very short, implying that he feared Peschiera had discovered his retreat—and requesting Lady Lansmere to retain Violante, whatever her own desire, till her ladyship heard from him again.

The Countess read, and her lip curled in disdain. "Strange!" said she, half to herself.

"Strange!" said Randal, "that a man like your correspondent should fear one like the Count di Peschiera. Is that it?"

"Sir," said the Countess, a little surprised—"strange that any man should fear another in a country like ours!"

"I don't know," said Randal, with his low soft laugh; "I fear many men, and I know many who ought to fear me; yet at every turn of the street one meets a policeman?"

"Yes," said Lady Lansmere. "But to suppose that this profligate foreigner could carry away a girl like Violante against her will—a man she has never seen, and whom she must have been taught to hate!"

"Be on your guard, nevertheless, I pray you, madam; 'where there's a will there's a way.'"

Randal took his leave, and returned to Madame di Negra's. He stayed with her an hour, revisited the Count, and then strolled to Limmer's.

"Randal," said the Squire, who looked pale and worn, but who scorned to confess the weakness with which he still grieved and yearned for his rebellious son—"Randal, you have nothing now to do in London; can you come and stay with me, and take to farming? I remember that you showed a good deal of sound knowledge about thin sowing."

"My dear sir, I will come to you as soon as the general election is over."

"What the deuce have you got to do with the general election?"

"Mr Egerton has some wish that I should enter Parliament; indeed, negotiations for that purpose are now on foot."

The Squire shook his head. "I don't like my half-brother's politics."

"I shall be quite independent of them," cried Randal, loftily; "that independence is the condition for which I stipulate."

"Glad to hear it; and if you do come into Parliament, I hope you'll not turn your back on the land?"

"Turn my back on the land!" cried Randal, with devout horror. "Oh, sir! I'm not so unnatural!"

"That's the right way to put it," quoth the credulous Squire; "it is unnatural! It is turning one's back on one's own mother. The land is a mother——"

"To those who live by her, certainly—a mother," said Randal, gravely. "And though, indeed, my father starves by her rather than lives, and Rood Hall is not like Hazeldean, still—I——"

"Hold your tongue," interrupted the Squire; "I want to talk to you. Your grandmother was a Hazeldean."

"Her picture is in the drawing-room at Rood. People think me very like her."

"Indeed!" said the Squire. "The Hazeldeans are generally inclined to be stout and rosy, which you are certainly not. But no fault of yours. We are all as Heaven made us! However, to the point. I am going to alter my will"—(said with a choking gulp). "This is the rough draft for the lawyers to work upon."

"Pray—pray, sir, do not speak to me on such a subject. I cannot bear to contemplate even the possibility of—of——"

"My death? Ha! ha! Nonsense. My own son calculated on the date of it by the insurance tables. Ha, ha, ha! A very fashionable son—eh! Ha, ha!"

"Poor Frank! do not let him suffer for a momentary forgetfulness of right feeling. When he comes to be married to that foreign lady, and be a father himself, he——"

"Father himself!" burst forth the Squire. "Father to a swarm of sallow-faced Popish tadpoles! No foreign frogs shall hop about my grave in Hazeldean churchyard. No, no. But you need not look so reproachful —I'm not going to disinherit Frank."

"Of course not," said Randal, with a bitter curve in the lip that rebelled against the joyous smile which he sought to impose on it.

"No—I shall leave him the life-interest in the greater part of the property; but if he marry a foreigner, her children will not succeed—you will stand after him in that case. But—(now don't interrupt me)—but Frank looks as if he would live longer than you—so small thanks to me for my good intentions, you may say. I mean to do more for you than a mere barren place in the entail. What do you say to marrying?"

"Just as you please," said Randal, meekly.

"Good. There's Miss Sticktorights disengaged—great heiress. Her lands run on to Rood. At one time I thought of her for that graceless puppy of mine. But I can manage more easily to make up the match for you. There's a mortgage on the property; old Sticktorights would be very glad to pay it off. I'll pay it out of the Hazeldean estate, and give up the right of way into the bargain. You understand? So come down as soon as you can, and court the young lady yourself."

Randal expressed his thanks with much grateful eloquence; and he then delicately insinuated, that if the Squire ever did mean to bestow upon him any

pecuniary favours (always without injury to Frank), it would gratify him more to win back some portions of the old estate of Rood, than to have all the acres of the Sticktorights, however free from any other incumbrance than the amiable heiress.

The Squire listened to Randal with benignant attention. This wish the country gentleman could well understand and sympathise with. He promised to inquire into the matter, and to see what could be done with old Thornhill.

Randal here let out that Mr Thornhill was about to dispose of a large slice of the ancient Leslie estate through Levy, and that he, Randal, could thus get it at a more moderate price than would be natural if Mr Thornhill knew that his neighbour the Squire would bid for the purchase.

"Better say nothing about it either to Levy or Thornhill."

"Right," said the Squire. "No proprietor likes to sell to another proprietor, in the same shire, as largely acred as himself: it spoils the balance of power. See to the business yourself; and if I can help you with the purchase (after that boy is married—I can attend to nothing before), why, I will."

Randal now went to Egerton's. The statesman was in his library, settling the accounts of his house-steward, and giving brief orders for the reduction of his establishment to that of an ordinary private gentleman.

"I may go abroad if I lose my election," said Egerton, condescending to assign to his servant a reason for

his economy; "and if I do not lose it, still, now I am out of office, I shall live much in private."

"Do I disturb you, sir?" said Randal, entering.

"No—I have just done."

The house-steward withdrew, much surprised and disgusted, and meditating the resignation of his own office—in order, not like Egerton, to save, but to spend. The house-steward had private dealings with Baron Levy, and was in fact the veritable X. Y. of the *Times*, for whom Dick Avenel had been mistaken. He invested his wages and perquisites in the discount of bills; and it was part of his own money that had (though unknown to himself) swelled the last five thousand pounds which Egerton had borrowed from Levy.

"I have settled with our committee; and, with Lord Lansmere's consent," said Egerton, briefly, "you will stand for the borough, as we proposed, in conjunction with myself. And should any accident happen to me —that is, should I vacate this seat from any cause, you may succeed to it—very shortly perhaps. Ingratiate yourself with the electors, and speak at the public-houses for both of us. I shall stand on my dignity, and leave the work of election to you. No thanks—you know how I hate thanks. Good-night."

"I never stood so near to fortune and to power," said Randal, as he slowly undressed. "And I owe it but to knowledge—knowledge of men—life—of all that books can teach us."

So his slight thin fingers dropped the extinguisher

on the candle, and the prosperous schemer laid himself down to rest in the dark. Shutters closed, curtains down—never was rest more quiet, never was room more dark!

That evening, Harley had dined at his father's. He spoke much to Helen—scarcely at all to Violante. But it so happened that when later, and a little while before he took his leave, Helen, at his request, was playing a favourite air of his; Lady Lansmere, who had been seated between him and Violante, left the room, and Violante turned quickly towards Harley.

"Do you know the Marchesa di Negra?" she asked, in a hurried voice.

"A little. Why do you ask?"

"That is my secret," answered Violante, trying to smile with her old frank, childlike archness. "But tell me, do you think better of her than of her brother?"

"Certainly. I believe her heart to be good, and that she is not without generous qualities."

"Can you not induce my father to see her? Would you not counsel him to do so?"

"Any wish of yours is a law to me," answered Harley, gallantly. "You wish your father to see her? I will try and persuade him to do so. Now, in return, confide to me your secret. What is your object?"

"Leave to return to my Italy. I care not for honours—for rank; and even my father has ceased to regret their loss. But the land, the native land—Oh, to see it once more! Oh, to die there!"

"Die! You children have so lately left heaven,

that ye talk as if ye could return there, without passing through the gates of sorrow, infirmity, and age! But I thought you were content with England. Why so eager to leave it? Violante, you are unkind to us —to Helen, who already loves you so well."

As Harley spoke, Helen rose from the piano, and, approaching Violante, placed her hand caressingly on the Italian's shoulder. Violante shivered and shrunk away. The eyes both of Harley and Helen followed her. Harley's eyes were very grave and thoughtful.

"Is she not changed—your friend?" said he, looking down.

"Yes, lately—much changed. I fear there is something on her mind—I know not what."

"Ah!" muttered Harley, "it may be so; but at your age and hers, nothing rests on the mind long. Observe, I say the mind—the heart is more tenacious."

Helen sighed softly, but deeply.

"And therefore," continued Harley, half to himself, "we can detect when something is on the mind—some care, some fear, some trouble. But when the heart closes over its own more passionate sorrow, who can discover! who conjecture! Yet you at least, my pure, candid Helen—you might subject mind and heart alike to the fabled window of glass."

"Oh, no!" cried Helen, involuntarily.

"Oh, yes! Do not let me think that you have one secret I may not know, or one sorrow I may not share. For, in our relationship, *that* would be deceit."

He pressed her hand with more than usual tenderness as he spoke, and shortly afterwards left the house.

And all that night Helen felt like a guilty thing—more wretched even than Violante.

CHAPTER V.

EARLY the next morning, while Violante was still in her room, a letter addressed to her came by the post. The direction was in a strange hand. She opened it, and read, in Italian, what is thus translated :—

"I would gladly see you, but I cannot call openly at the house in which you live. Perhaps I may have it in my power to arrange family dissensions—to repair any wrongs your father may have sustained. Perhaps I may be enabled to render yourself an essential service. But for all this, it is necessary that we should meet and confer frankly. Meanwhile time presses—delay is forbidden. Will you meet me, an hour after noon, in the lane, just outside the private gate of your gardens? I shall be alone, and you cannot fear to meet one of your own sex and a kinswoman. Ah, I so desire to see you! Come, I beseech you.

"BEATRICE."

Violante read, and her decision was taken. She was naturally fearless, and there was little that she would not have braved for the chance of serving her

father. And now all peril seemed slight in comparison with that which awaited her in Randal's suit, backed by her father's approval. Randal had said that Madame di Negra alone could aid her in escape from himself. Harley had said that Madame di Negra had generous qualities; and who but Madame di Negra would write herself a kinswoman, and sign herself Beatrice?

A little before the appointed hour, she stole unobserved through the trees, opened the little gate, and found herself in the quiet solitary lane. In a few minutes, a female figure came up, with a quick, light step; and, throwing aside her veil, said, with a sort of wild, suppressed energy, "It is you! I was truly told. Beautiful;—beautiful! And, oh! what youth and what bloom!"

The voice dropped mournfully; and Violante, surprised by the tone, and blushing under the praise, remained a moment silent; then she said, with some hesitation—

"You are, I presume, the Marchesa di Negra? And I have heard of you enough to induce me to trust you."

"Of me! From whom?" asked Beatrice, almost fiercely.

"From Mr Leslie, and—and——"

"Go on—why falter?"

"From Lord L'Estrange."

"From no one else?"

"Not that I remember."

Beatrice sighed heavily, and let fall her veil. Some foot-passengers now came up the lane; and seeing two ladies, of mien so remarkable, turned round, and gazed curiously.

"We cannot talk here," said Beatrice, impatiently; "and I have so much to say—so much to know. Trust me yet more; it is for yourself I speak. My carriage waits yonder. Come home with me—I will not detain you an hour; and I will bring you back."

This proposition startled Violante. She retreated towards the gate with a gesture of dissent. Beatrice laid her hand on the girl's arm, and again lifting her veil, gazed at her with a look, half of scorn, half of admiration.

"I, too, would once have recoiled from one step beyond the formal line by which the world divides liberty from woman. Now see how bold I am. Child, child, do not trifle with your destiny. You may never again have the same occasion offered to you. It is not only to meet you that I am here; I must know something of you—something of your heart. Why shrink? —is not the heart pure?"

Violante made no answer; but her smile, so sweet and so lofty, humbled the questioner it rebuked.

"I may restore to Italy your father," said Beatrice, with an altered voice. "Come!"

Violante approached, but still hesitatingly.

"Not by union with your brother?"

"You dread that so much then?"

"Dread it? No! Why should I dread what is in

my power to reject. But if you can really restore my father, and by nobler means, you may save me for——"

Violante stopped abruptly; the Marchesa's eyes sparkled.

"Save you for—ah! I can guess what you leave unsaid. But come, come—more strangers—see; you shall tell me all at my own house. And if you can make one sacrifice, why, I will save you all else. Come, or farewell for ever!"

Violante placed her hand in Beatrice's, with a frank confidence that brought the accusing blood into the Marchesa's cheek.

"We are women both," said Violante, "we descend from the same noble house; we have knelt alike to the same Virgin Mother; why should I not believe and trust you?"

"Why not?" muttered Beatrice, feebly; and she moved on, with her head bowed on her breast, and all the pride of her step was gone.

They reached a carriage that stood by the angle of the road. Beatrice spoke a word apart to the driver, who was an Italian, in the pay of the Count; the man nodded, and opened the carriage door. The ladies entered. Beatrice pulled down the blinds; the man remounted his box, and drove on rapidly.

Beatrice, leaning back, groaned aloud. Violante drew nearer to her side. "Are you in pain?" said she, with her tender, melodious voice; "or can I serve you as you would serve me?"

"Child, give me your hand, and be silent while I

look at you. Was I ever so fair as this? Never! And what deeps—what deeps roll between her and me!"

She said this as of some one absent, and again sank into silence; but continued still to gaze on Violante, whose eyes, veiled by their long fringes, drooped beneath the gaze.

Suddenly Beatrice started, exclaiming, "No, it shall not be!" and placed her hand on the check-string.

"What shall not be?" asked Violante, surprised by the cry and the action. Beatrice paused—her breast heaved visibly under her dress.

"Stay," she said slowly. "As you say, we are both women of the same noble house; you would reject the suit of my brother, yet you have seen him; his the form to please the eye—his the arts that allure the fancy. He offers to you rank, wealth, your father's pardon and recall. If I could remove the objections which your father entertains—prove that the Count has less wronged him than he deems, would you still reject the rank, and the wealth, and the hand of Giulio Franzini?"

"Oh yes, yes, were his hand a king's!"

"Still, then, as woman to woman—both, as you say, akin, and sprung from the same lineage—still, then, answer me—answer me, for you speak to one who has loved—Is it not that you love another?—Speak."

"I do not know. Nay, not love—it was a romance; it is a thing impossible. Do not question—I cannot

answer." And the broken words were choked by sudden tears.

Beatrice's face grew hard and pitiless. Again she lowered her veil, and withdrew her hand from the check-string; but the coachman had felt the touch, and halted. "Drive on," said Beatrice, "as you were directed."

Both were now long silent—Violante with great difficulty recovering from her emotion, Beatrice breathing hard, and her arms folded firmly across her breast.

Meanwhile the carriage had entered London—it passed the quarter in which Madame di Negra's house was situated—it rolled fast over a bridge—it whirled through a broad thoroughfare, then through defiles of lanes, with tall blank dreary houses on either side. On it went, and on, till Violante suddenly took alarm. "Do you live so far?" she said, drawing up the blind. and gazing in dismay on the strange ignoble suburb, "I shall be missed already. Oh, let us turn back, I beseech you!"

"We are nearly there now. The driver has taken this road in order to avoid those streets in which we might have been seen together—perhaps by my brother himself. Listen to me, and talk of—of the lover whom you rightly associate with a vain romance. 'Impossible,'—yes, it is impossible!"

Violante clasped her hands before her eyes, and bowed down her head. "Why are you so cruel?" said she. "This is not what you promised. How

are you to serve my father—how restore him to his country? This is what you promised!"

"If you consent to one sacrifice, I will fulfil that promise. We are arrived."

The carriage stopped before a tall dull house, divided from other houses by a high wall that appeared to enclose a yard, and standing at the end of a narrow lane, which was bounded on the one side by the Thames. In that quarter the river was crowded with gloomy, dark-looking vessels and craft, all lying lifeless under the wintry sky.

The driver dismounted and rang the bell. Two swarthy Italian faces presented themselves at the threshold.

Beatrice descended lightly, and gave her hand to Violante. "Now, here we shall be secure," said she; "and here a few minutes may suffice to decide your fate."

As the door closed on Violante—who, now waking to suspicion, to alarm, looked fearfully round the dark and dismal hall—Beatrice turned: "Let the carriage wait."

The Italian who received the order bowed and smiled; but when the two ladies had ascended the stairs, he reopened the street-door and said to the driver, "Back to the Count, and say 'all is safe.'"

The carriage drove off. The man who had given this order barred and locked the door, and, taking with him the huge key, plunged into the mystic

recesses of the basement and disappeared. The hall, thus left solitary, had the grim aspect of a prison; the strong door sheeted with iron—the rugged stone stairs, lighted by a high window grimed with the dust of years, and jealously barred—and the walls themselves abutting out rudely here and there, as if against violence even from within.

CHAPTER VI.

It was, as we have seen, without taking counsel of the faithful Jemima, that the sage recluse of Norwood had yielded to his own fears, and Randal's subtle suggestions, in the concise and arbitrary letter which he had written to Violante; but at night, when churchyards give up the dead, and conjugal hearts the secrets hid by day from each other, the wise man informed his wife of the step he had taken. And Jemima then, who held English notions, very different from those which prevail in Italy, as to the right of fathers to dispose of their daughters without reference to inclination or repugnance—so sensibly yet so mildly represented to the pupil of Machiavelli that he had not gone exactly the right way to work, if he feared that the handsome Count had made some impression on Violante, and if he wished her to turn with favour to the suitor he recommended—that so abrupt a command could only chill the heart, revolt the will, and even give to the audacious Peschiera some romantic attraction which he had not before possessed—as effectually to destroy Riccabocca's sleep that night. And the next day he sent Giacomo to Lady Lansmere's with a

very kind letter to Violante and a note to the hostess, praying the latter to bring his daughter to Norwood for a few hours, as he much wished to converse with both. It was on Giacomo's arrival at Knightsbridge that Violante's absence was discovered. Lady Lansmere, ever proudly careful of the world and its gossip, kept Giacomo from betraying his excitement to her servants, and stated throughout the decorous household that the young lady had informed her she was going to visit some friends that morning, and had no doubt gone through the garden gate, since it was found open; the way was more quiet there than by the high-road, and her friends might have therefore walked to meet her by the lane. Lady Lansmere observed that her only surprise was that Violante had gone earlier than she had expected. Having said this with a composure that compelled belief, Lady Lansmere ordered the carriage, and, taking Giacomo with her, drove at once to consult her son.

Harley's quick intellect had scarcely recovered from the shock upon his emotions, before Randal Leslie was announced.

"Ah," said Lady Lansmere, "Mr Leslie may know something. He came to her yesterday with a note from her father. Pray let him enter."

The Austrian Prince approached Harley. "I will wait in the next room," he whispered. "You may want me if you have cause to suspect Peschiera in all this."

Lady Lansmere was pleased with the Prince's delicacy, and, glancing at Leonard, said, "Perhaps you too, sir, may kindly aid us, if you would retire with the Prince. Mr Leslie may be disinclined to speak of affairs like these, except to Harley and myself."

"True, madam; but beware of Mr Leslie."

As the door at one end of the room closed on the Prince and Leonard, Randal entered at the other, seemingly much agitated.

"I have just been to your house, Lady Lansmere. I heard you were here; pardon me if I have followed you. I had called at Knightsbridge to see Violante—learned that she had left you. I implore you to tell me how or wherefore. I have the right to ask: her father has promised me her hand."

Harley's falcon eye had brightened up at Randal's entrance. It watched steadily the young man's face. It was clouded for a moment by his knitted brows at Randal's closing words. But he left it to Lady Lansmere to reply and explain. This the Countess did briefly.

Randal clasped his hands. "And she not gone to her father's? Are you sure of that?"

"Her father's servant has just come from Norwood."

"Oh, I am to blame for this! It is my rash suit—her fear of it—her aversion. I see it all!" Randal's voice was hollow with remorse and despair. "To save her from Peschiera, her father insisted on her immediate marriage with myself. His orders were too abrupt, my own wooing too unwelcome. I know her high

spirit; she has fled to escape from me. But whither, if not to Norwood?—oh, whither? What other friends has she—what relations?"

"You throw a new light on this mystery," said Lady Lansmere; "perhaps she may have gone to her father's after all, and the servant may have crossed, but missed her on the way. I will drive to Norwood at once."

"Do so—do; but if she be not there, be careful not to alarm Riccabocca with the news of her disappearance. Caution Giacomo not to do so. He would only suspect Peschiera, and be hurried to some act of violence."

"Do not you, then, suspect Peschiera, Mr Leslie?" asked Harley, suddenly.

"Ha! is it possible? Yet, no. I called on him this morning with Frank Hazeldean, who is to marry his sister. I was with him till I went on to Knightsbridge, at the very time of Violante's disappearance. He could not then have been a party to it."

"You saw Violante yesterday. Did you speak to her of Madame di Negra?" asked Harley, suddenly recalling the questions respecting the Marchesa which Violante had addressed to him.

In spite of himself, Randal felt that he changed countenance. "Of Madame di Negra? I do not think so. Yet I might. Oh, yes, I remember now. She asked me the Marchesa's address; I would not give it."

"The address is easily found. Can she have gone to the Marchesa's house?"

"I will run there, and see," cried Randal, starting up.

"And I with you. Stay, my dear mother. Proceed, as you propose, to Norwood, and take Mr Leslie's advice. Spare our friend the news of his daughter's loss—if lost she be—till she is restored to him. He can be of no use meanwhile. Let Giacomo rest here; I may want him."

Harley then passed into the next room, and entreated the Prince and Leonard to await his return, and allow Giacomo to stay in the same room.

He then went quickly back to Randal. Whatever might be his fears or emotions, Harley felt that he had need of all his coolness of judgment and presence of mind. The occasion made abrupt demand upon powers which had slept since boyhood, but which now woke with a vigour that would have made even Randal tremble, could he have detected the wit, the courage, the electric energies, masked under that tranquil self-possession. Lord L'Estrange and Randal soon reached the Marchesa's house, and learned that she had been out since morning in one of Count Peschiera's carriages. Randal stole an alarmed glance at Harley's face. Harley did not seem to notice it.

"Now, Mr Leslie, what do you advise next?"

"I am at a loss. Ah, perhaps, afraid of her father—knowing how despotic is his belief in paternal rights, and how tenacious he is of his word once passed, as it has been to me, she may have resolved to take refuge in the country—perhaps at the Casino, or at Mrs Dale's,

or Mrs Hazeldean's. I will hasten to inquire at the coach-office. Meanwhile, you——"

"Never mind me, Mr Leslie. Do what you think best. But, if your surmises be just, you must have been a very rude wooer to the high-born lady you aspired to win."

"Not so; but perhaps an unwelcome one. If she has indeed fled from me, need I say that my suit will be withdrawn at once? I am not a selfish lover, Lord L'Estrange."

"Nor I a vindictive man. Yet, could I discover who has conspired against this lady, a guest under my father's roof, I would crush him into the mire as easily as I set my foot upon this glove. Good-day to you, Mr Leslie."

Randal stood still for a few moments as Harley strided on; then his lip sneered as it muttered—"Insolent! But does he love her? If so, I am avenged already."

CHAPTER VII.

HARLEY went straight to Peschiera's hotel. He was told that the Count had walked out with Mr Frank Hazeldean and some other gentlemen who had breakfasted with him. He had left word, in case any one called, that he had gone to Tattersall's to look at some horses that were for sale. To Tattersall's went Harley. The Count was in the yard leaning against a pillar, and surrounded by fashionable friends. Lord L'Estrange paused, and, with an heroic effort at self-mastery, repressed his rage. "I may lose all if I show that I suspect him; and yet I must insult and fight him rather than leave his movements free. Ah, is that young Hazeldean? A thought strikes me!" Frank was standing apart from the group round the Count, and looking very absent and very sad. Harley touched him on the shoulder, and drew him aside unobserved by the Count.

"Mr Hazeldean, your uncle Egerton is my dearest friend. Will you be a friend to me? I want you."

"My Lord——"

"Follow me. Do not let Count Peschiera see us talking together."

Harley quitted the yard, and entered St James's Park by the little gate close by. In a very few words he informed Frank of Violante's disappearance, and of his reasons for suspecting the Count. Frank's first sentiment was that of indignant disbelief that the brother of Beatrice could be so vile; but as he gradually called to mind the cynical and corrupt vein of the Count's familiar conversation—the hints to Peschiera's prejudice that had been dropped by Beatrice herself—and the general character for brilliant and daring profligacy which even the admirers of the Count ascribed to him —Frank was compelled to reluctant acquiescence in Harley's suspicions; and he said, with an earnest gravity very rare to him—"Believe me, Lord L'Estrange, if I can assist you in defeating a base and mercenary design against this poor young lady, you have but to show me how. One thing is clear—Peschiera was not personally engaged in this abduction, since I have been with him all day; and—now I think of it—I begin to hope that you wrong him; for he has invited a large party of us to make an excursion with him to Boulogne next week, in order to try his yacht, which he could scarcely do if——"

"Yacht, at this time of the year! a man who habitually resides at Vienna—a yacht!"

"Spendquick sells it a bargain, on account of the time of year and other reasons; and the Count proposes to spend next summer in cruising about the Ionian Isles. He has some property on those isles, which he has never yet visited."

"How long is it since he bought this yacht?"

"Why I am not sure that it is already bought—that is, paid for. Levy was to meet Spendquick this very morning to arrange the matter. Spendquick complains that Levy screws him."

"My dear Mr Hazeldean, you are guiding me through the maze. Where shall I find Lord Spendquick?"

"At this hour, probably, in bed. Here is his card."

"Thanks. And where lies the vessel?"

"It was off Blackwall the other day. I went to see it—'The Flying Dutchman'—a fine vessel, and carries guns."

"Enough. Now, heed me. There can be no immediate danger to Violante, so long as Peschiera does not meet her—so long as we know his movements. You are about to marry his sister. Avail yourself of that privilege to keep close by his side. Refuse to be shaken off. Make what excuses for the present your invention suggests. I will give you an excuse. Be anxious and uneasy to know where you can find Madame di Negra."

"Madame di Negra!" cried Frank. "What of her? Is she not in Curzon Street?"

"No; she has gone out in one of the Count's carriages. In all probability the driver of that carriage, or some servant in attendance on it, will come to the Count in the course of the day; and, in order to get rid of you, the Count will tell you to see this servant, and ascertain yourself that his sister is safe. Pretend to believe what the man says, but make him come to

your lodgings on pretence of writing there a letter for the Marchesa. Once at your lodgings, and he will be safe; for I shall see that the officers of justice secure him. The moment he is there, send an express for me to my hotel."

"But," said Frank, a little bewildered, "if I go to my lodgings, how can I watch the Count?"

"It will not then be necessary. Only get him to accompany you to your lodgings, and part with him at the door."

"Stop, stop—you cannot suspect Madame di Negra of connivance in a scheme so infamous. Pardon me, Lord L'Estrange; I cannot act in this matter—cannot even hear you except as your foe, if you insinuate a word against the honour of the woman I love."

"Brave gentleman, your hand. It is Madame di Negra I would save, as well as my friend's young child. Think but of her, while you act as I entreat, and all will go well. I confide in you. Now, return to the Count."

Frank walked back to join Peschiera, and his brow was thoughtful, and his lips closed firmly. Harley had that gift which belongs to the genius of Action. He inspired others with the light of his own spirit and the force of his own will. Harley next hastened to Lord Spendquick, remained with that young gentleman some minutes, then repaired to his hotel, where Leonard, the Prince, and Giacomo still awaited him.

"Come with me, both of you. You, too, Giacomo. I must now see the police. We may then divide upon separate missions."

"Oh, my dear lord," cried Leonard, "you must have had good news. You seem cheerful and sanguine."

"*Seem!* Nay I *am* so! If I once paused to despond—even to doubt—I should go mad. A foe to baffle, and an angel to save! Whose spirits would not rise high—whose wits would not move quick to the warm pulse of his heart?"

CHAPTER VIII.

TWILIGHT was dark in the room to which Beatrice had conducted Violante. A great change had come over Beatrice. Humble and weeping, she knelt beside Violante, hiding her face, and imploring pardon. And Violante, striving to resist the terror for which she now saw such cause as no woman-heart can defy, still sought to soothe, and still sweetly assured forgiveness.

Beatrice had learned—after quick and fierce questions—which at last compelled the answers that cleared away every doubt—that her jealousy had been groundless—that she had no rival in Violante. From that moment the passions that had made her the tool of guilt abruptly vanished, and her conscience startled her with the magnitude of her treachery. Perhaps had Violante's heart been wholly free, or she had been of that mere commonplace, girlish character, which women like Beatrice are apt to despise, the Marchesa's affection for Peschiera, and her dread of him, might have made her try to persuade her young kinswoman at least to receive the Count's visit—at least to suffer him to make his own excuses, and plead his own cause. But there had been a loftiness of spirit in which Violante had

first defied the Marchesa's questions, followed by such generous, exquisite sweetness, when the girl perceived how that wild heart was stung and maddened, and such purity of mournful candour when she had overcome her own virgin bashfulness sufficiently to undeceive the error she detected, and confess where her own affections were placed, that Beatrice bowed before her as mariner of old to some fair saint that had allayed the storm.

"I have deceived you!" she cried through her sobs; "but I will now save you at any cost Had you been as I deemed—the rival who had despoiled all the hopes of my future life—I could, without remorse, have been the accomplice I am pledged to be. But *now* you!—oh, you—so good and so noble—you can never be the bride of Peschiera. Nay, start not: he shall renounce his designs for ever, or I will go myself to our Emperor, and expose the dark secrets of his life. Return with me quick to the home from which I ensnared you."

Beatrice's hand was on the door while she spoke. Suddenly her face fell—her lips grew white; the door was locked from without. She called—no one answered; the bell-pull in the room gave no sound; the windows were high and barred—they did not look on the river, nor the street, but on a close, gloomy, silent yard—high blank walls all around it—no one to hear the cry of distress, rang it ever so loud and sharp.

Beatrice divined that she herself had been no less ensnared than her companion; that Peschiera, distrustful of her firmness in evil, had precluded her from the power of reparation. She was in a house only tenanted

by his hirelings. Not a hope to save Violante from a fate that now appalled her, seemed to remain. Thus, in incoherent self-reproaches and frenzied tears, Beatrice knelt beside her victim, communicating more and more the terrors that she felt, as the hours rolled on and the room darkened, till it was only by the dull lamp which gleamed through the grimy windows from the yard without, that each saw the face of the other.

Night came on; they heard a clock from some distant church strike the hours. The dim fire had long since burnt out, and the air became intensely cold. No one broke upon their solitude—not a voice was heard in the house. They felt neither cold nor hunger—they felt but the solitude, and the silence, and the dread of something that was to come.

At length, about midnight, a bell rang at the street door; then there was the quick sound of steps—of sullen bolts withdrawn—of low, murmured voices. Light streamed through the chinks of the door to the apartment—the door itself opened. Two Italians bearing tapers entered, and the Count di Peschiera followed.

Beatrice sprang up, and rushed towards her brother. He laid his hand gently on her lips, and motioned to the Italians to withdraw. They placed the lights on the table, and vanished without a word.

Peschiera then, putting aside his sister, approached Violante.

"Fair kinswoman," said he, with an air of easy but resolute assurance, "there are things which no man

can excuse, and no woman can pardon, unless that love, which is beyond all laws, suggests excuse for the one, and obtains pardon for the other. In a word, I have sworn to win you, and I have had no opportunities to woo. Fear not, the worst that can befall you is to be my bride. Stand aside, my sister, stand aside."

"Giulio, no! Giulio Franzini, I stand between you and her; you shall strike me to the earth before you can touch even the hem of her robe."

"What, my sister!—you turn against me?"

"And unless you instantly retire, and leave her free, I will unmask you to the Emperor."

"Too late, *mon enfant!* You will sail with us. The effects you may need for the voyage are already on board. You will be witness to our marriage, and by a holy son of the Church. Then tell the Emperor what you will."

With a light and sudden exertion of his strength, the Count put away Beatrice, and fell on his knee before Violante, who, drawn to her full height, death-like pale, but untrembling, regarded him with unutterable disdain.

"You scorn me now," said he, throwing into his features an expression of humility and admiration; "and I cannot wonder at it. But believe me, that until the scorn yield to a kinder sentiment, I will take no advantage of the power I have gained over your fate."

"Power!" said Violante, haughtily. "You have ensnared me into this house,—you have gained the power of a day; but the power over my fate—no!"

"You mean that your friends have discovered your disappearance, and are on your track. Fair one, I provide against your friends, and I defy all the laws and police of England. The vessel that will bear you from these shores waits in the river hard by. Beatrice, I warn you—be still—unhand me. In that vessel will be a priest, who shall join our hands, but not before you will recognise the truth, that she who flies with Giulio Peschiera must become his wife, or quit him as the disgrace of her house and the scorn of her sex."

"Oh, villain! villain!" cried Beatrice.

"*Peste*, my sister, gentler words. You, too, would marry. I tell no tales of you. Signorina, I grieve to threaten force. Give me your hand; we must be gone."

Violante eluded the clasp that would have profaned her, and, darting across the room, opened the door, and closed it hastily behind her. Beatrice clung firmly to the Count, to detain him from pursuit. But just without the door, close, as if listening to what passed within, stood a man wrapped from head to foot in a large boat-cloak. The ray of the lamp that beamed on the man glittered on the barrel of a pistol which he held in his right hand.

"Hist!" whispered the man, in English, and passing his arm round her—"in this house you are in that ruffian's power; out of it, safe. Ah! I am by your side—I, Violante!"

The voice thrilled to Violante's heart. She started—looked up, but nothing was seen of the man's face,

what with the hat and cloak, save a mass of raven curls, and a beard of the same hue.

The Count now threw open the door, dragging after him his sister, who still clung round him.

"Ha—that is well!" he cried to the man, in Italian. "Bear the lady after me, gently; but if she attempt to cry out—why, force enough to silence her, not more. As for you, Beatrice, traitress that you are, I could strike you to the earth—but—No, this suffices." He caught his sister in his arms as he spoke, and, regardless of her cries and struggles, sprang down the stairs.

The hall was crowded with fierce swarthy men. The Count turned to one of them, and whispered; in an instant the Marchesa was seized and gagged. The Count cast a look over his shoulder; Violante was close behind, supported by the man to whom Peschiera had consigned her, and who was pointing to Beatrice, and appeared warning Violante against resistance. Violante was silent, and seemed resigned. Peschiera smiled cynically, and, preceded by some of his hirelings, who held torches, descended a few steps that led to an abrupt landing-place between the hall and the basement story. There a small door stood open, and the river flowed close by. A boat was moored on the bank, round which grouped four men, who had the air of foreign sailors. At the appearance of Peschiera, three of these men sprang into the boat, and got ready their oars. The fourth carefully readjusted a plank thrown from the boat to the wharf, and offered his arm obsequiously to Peschiera. The Count was the first to

enter, and, humming a gay opera air, took his place by the helm. The two females were next lifted in, and Violante felt her hand pressed almost convulsively by the man who stood by the plank. The rest followed, and in another minute the boat bounded swiftly over the waves towards a vessel that lay several furlongs adown the river, and apart from all the meaner craft that crowded the stream. The stars struggled pale through the foggy atmosphere; not a word was heard within the boat—no sound, save the regular splash of the oars. The Count paused from his lively tune, and gathering round him the ample fold of his fur pelisse, seemed absorbed in thought. Even by the imperfect light of the stars, Peschiera's face wore an air of sovereign triumph. The result had justified that careless and insolent confidence in himself and in fortune, which was the most prominent feature in the character of the man who, both bravo and gamester, had played against the world, with his rapier in one hand, and cogged dice in the other. Violante, once in a vessel filled by his own men, was irretrievably in his power. Even her father must feel grateful to learn that the captive of Peschiera had saved name and repute in becoming Peschiera's wife. Even the pride of sex in Violante herself must induce her to confirm what Peschiera, of course, intended to state, viz., that she was a willing partner in a bridegroom's schemes of flight towards the altar, rather than the poor victim of a betrayer, and receiving his hand but from his mercy.

He saw his fortune secured, his success envied, his very character rehabilitated by his splendid nuptials. Ambition began to mingle with his dreams of pleasure and pomp. What post in the court or the state too high for the aspirations of one who had evinced the most incontestable talent for active life—the talent to succeed in all that the will had undertaken? Thus mused the Count, half forgetful of the present, and absorbed in the golden future, till he was aroused by a loud hail from the vessel, and the bustle on board the boat, as the sailors caught at the rope flung forth to them. He then rose and moved towards Violante. But the man who was still in charge of her passed the Count lightly, half-leading, half-carrying, his passive prisoner. "Pardon, Excellency," said the man, in Italian, "but the boat is crowded, and rocks so much, that your aid would but disturb our footing." Before Peschiera could reply, Violante was already on the steps of the vessel, and the Count paused till, with elated smile, he saw her safely standing on the deck. Beatrice followed, and then Peschiera himself; but when the Italians in his train also thronged towards the sides of the boat, two of the sailors got before them, and let go the rope, while the other two plied their oars vigorously, and pulled back towards shore. The Italians burst into an amazed and indignant volley of execrations. "Silence," said the sailor who had stood by the plank, "we obey orders. If you are not quiet, we shall upset the boat. *We* can swim; Heaven and Monsignore San Giacomo pity you if you cannot!"

Meanwhile, as Peschiera leaped upon deck, a flood of light poured upon him from lifted torches. That light streamed full on the face and form of a man of commanding stature, whose arm was around Violante, and whose dark eyes flashed upon the Count more luminously than the torches. On one side this man stood the Austrian Prince; on the other side (a cloak and a profusion of false dark locks at his feet) stood Lord L'Estrange, his arms folded, and his lips curved by a smile, in which the ironical humour native to the man was tempered with a calm and supreme disdain. The Count strove to speak, but his voice faltered.

All around him looked ominous and hostile. He saw many Italian faces, but they scowled at him with vindictive hate; in the rear were English mariners, peering curiously over the shoulders of the foreigners, and with a broad grin on their open countenances. Suddenly, as the Count thus stood perplexed, cowering, stupefied, there burst from all the Italians present a hoot of unutterable scorn—"*Il traditore! il traditore!*"—(the traitor! the traitor!)[1]

The Count was brave, and at the cry he lifted his head with a certain majesty.

At that moment Harley, raising his hand as if to silence the hoot, came forth from the group by which he had been hitherto standing, and towards him the Count advanced with a bold stride.

"What trick is this?" he said, in French, fiercely. "I divine that it is you whom I can single out for explanation and atonement."

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"*Pardieu, Monsieur le Comte,*" answered Harley, in the same language, which lends itself so well to polished sarcasm and high-bred enmity—"let us distinguish. Explanation should come from me, I allow; but atonement I have the honour to resign to yourself. This vessel——"

"Is mine!" cried the Count. "Those men who insult me should be in my pay."

"The men in your pay, *Monsieur le Comte*, are on shore, drinking success to your voyage. But, anxious still to procure you the gratification of being amongst your own countrymen, those whom I have taken into my pay are still better Italians than the pirates whose place they supply; perhaps not such good sailors; but then I have taken the liberty to add to the equipment of a vessel, which has cost me too much to risk lightly, some stout English seamen, who are mariners more practised than even your pirates. Your grand mistake, *Monsieur le Comte*, is in thinking that the 'Flying Dutchman' is yours. With many apologies for interfering with your intention to purchase it, I beg to inform you that Lord Spendquick has kindly sold it to me. Nevertheless, *Monsieur le Comte*, for the next few weeks I place it—men and all—at your service."

Peschiera smiled scornfully.

"I thank your lordship; but since I presume that I shall no longer have the travelling-companion who alone could make the voyage attractive, I shall return to shore, and will simply request you to inform me at what hour you can receive the friend whom I shall

depute to discuss that part of the question yet untouched, and to arrange that the atonement, whether it be due from me or yourself, may be rendered as satisfactory as you have condescended to make the explanation."

"Let not that vex you, *Monsieur le Comte*—the atonement is, in much, made already; so anxious have I been to forestall all that your nice sense of honour would induce so complete a gentleman to desire. You have ensnared a young heiress, it is true; but you see that it was only to restore her to the arms of her father. You have juggled an illustrious kinsman out of his heritage; but you have voluntarily come on board this vessel, first, to enable his highness the Prince Von ——, of whose rank at the Austrian court you are fully aware, to state to your Emperor that he himself has been witness of the manner in which you interpreted his Imperial Majesty's assent to your nuptials with a child of one of the first subjects in his Italian realm; and, next, to commence by an excursion to the seas of the Baltic, the sentence of banishment which I have no doubt will accompany the same act that restores to the chief of your house his lands and his honours."

The Count started.

"That restoration," said the Austrian Prince, who had advanced to Harley's side, "I already guarantee. Disgrace that you are, Giulio Franzini, to the nobles of the empire, I will not leave my royal master till his hand strike your name from the roll. I have here your own letters to prove that your kinsman was duped by yourself into the revolt which you would have headed

as a Catiline, if it had not better suited your nature to betray it as a Judas. In ten days from this time, these letters will be laid before the Emperor and his Council."

"Are you satisfied, *Monsieur le Comte*," said Harley, "with your atonement so far? if not, I have procured you the occasion to render it yet more complete. Before you stands the kinsman you have wronged. He knows now, that though, for a while, you ruined his fortunes, you failed to sully his hearth. His heart can grant you pardon, and hereafter his hand may give you alms. Kneel then, Giulio Franzini—kneel at the feet of Alphonso, Duke of Serrano."

The above dialogue had been in French, which only a few of the Italians present understood, and that imperfectly; but at the name with which Harley concluded his address to the Count, a simultaneous cry from those Italians broke forth.

"Alphonso the Good!—Alphonso the Good! *Viva—viva*—the good Duke of Serrano!"

And, forgetful even of the Count, they crowded round the tall form of Riccabocca, striving who should first kiss his hand—the very hem of his garments.

Riccabocca's eyes overflowed. The gaunt exile seemed transfigured into another and more kingly man. An inexpressible dignity invested him. He stretched forth his arms, as if to bless his countrymen. Even that rude cry, from humble men, exiles like himself, consoled him for years of banishment and penury.

"Thanks, thanks," he continued; "thanks. Some

day or other, you will all perhaps return with me to the beloved land!"

The Austrian Prince bowed his head, as if in assent to the prayer.

"Giulio Franzini," said the Duke of Serrano—for so we may now call the threadbare recluse of the Casino —"had this last villanous design of yours been allowed by Providence, think you that there is one spot on earth on which the ravisher could have been saved from a father's arm? But now, Heaven has been more kind. In this hour let me imitate its mercy;" and with relaxing brow the Duke mildly drew near to his guilty kinsman.

From the moment the Austrian Prince had addressed him, the Count had preserved a profound silence, showing neither repentance nor shame. Gathering himself up, he had stood firm, glaring round him like one at bay. But as the Duke now approached, he waved his hand, and exclaimed, "Back, pedant, back; you have not triumphed yet. And you, prating German, tell your tales to our Emperor. I shall be by his throne to answer —if, indeed, you escape from the meeting to which I will force you by the way." He spoke, and made a rush towards the side of the vessel. But Harley's quick wit had foreseen the Count's intention, and Harley's quick eye had given the signal by which it was frustrated. Seized in the gripe of his own watchful and indignant countrymen, just as he was about to plunge into the stream, Peschiera was dragged back—pinioned down.

Then the expression of his whole countenance changed; the desperate violence of the inborn gladiator broke forth. His great strength enabled him to break loose more than once, to dash more than one man to the floor of the deck; but at length, overpowered by numbers, though still struggling—all dignity, all attempt at presence of mind gone, uttering curses the most plebeian, gnashing his teeth, and foaming at the mouth, nothing seemed left of the brilliant Lothario but the coarse fury of the fierce natural man.

Then still preserving that air and tone of exquisite imperturbable irony which the highest comedian might have sought to imitate in vain, Harley bowed low to the storming Count.

"*Adieu, Monsieur le Comte, adieu!* The vessel which you have honoured me by entering is bound to Norway. The Italians who accompany you were sent by yourself into exile, and, in return, they now kindly promise to enliven you with their society, whenever you feel somewhat tired of your own. Conduct the Count to his cabin. Gently there, gently. *Adieu, Monsieur le Comte, adieu! et bon voyage.*"

Harley turned lightly on his heel, as Peschiera, in spite of his struggles, was now fairly carried down to the cabin.

"A trick for the trickster," said L'Estrange to the Austrian Prince. "The revenge of a farce on the would-be tragedian."

"More than that—he is ruined."

"And ridiculous," quoth Harley. "I should like to

see his look when they land him in Norway." Harley then passed towards the centre of the vessel, by which, hitherto partially concealed by the sailors, who were now busily occupied, stood Beatrice; Frank Hazeldean, who had first received her on entering the vessel, standing by her side; and Leonard, a little apart from the two, in quiet observation of all that had passed around him. Beatrice appeared but little to heed Frank; her dark eyes were lifted to the dim starry skies, and her lips were moving as if in prayer; yet her young lover was speaking to her in great emotion, low and rapidly.

"No, no—do not think for a moment that we suspect you, Beatrice, I will answer for your honour with my life. Oh, why will you turn from me—why will you not speak?"

"A moment later," said Beatrice, softly. "Give me one moment yet." She passed slowly and falteringly towards Leonard—placed her hand, that trembled, on her arm—and led him aside to the verge of the vessel. Frank, startled by her movement, made a step as if to follow, and then stopped short, and looked on, but with a clouded and doubtful countenance. Harley's smile had gone, and his eye was also watchful.

It was but a few words that Beatrice spoke—it was but a sentence or so that Leonard answered; and then Beatrice extended her hand, which the young poet bent over, and kissed in silence. She lingered an instant; and even by the starlight, Harley noted the blush that overspread her face. The blush faded as Beatrice re-

turned to Frank. Lord L'Estrange would have retired —she signed to him to stay.

"My lord," she said, very firmly, "I cannot accuse you of harshness to my sinful and unhappy brother. His offence might perhaps deserve a heavier punishment than that which you inflict with such playful scorn. But, whatever his penance, contempt now, or poverty later, I feel that his sister should be by his side to share it. I am not innocent, if he be guilty; and, wreck though he be, nothing else on this dark sea of life is now left to me to cling to. Hush, my lord! I shall not leave this vessel. All that I entreat of you is, to order your men to respect my brother, since a woman will be by his side."

"But Marchesa, this cannot be; and——"

"Beatrice, Beatrice—and me!—our betrothal? Do you forget me?" cried Frank, in reproachful agony.

"No, young and too noble lover; I shall remember you ever in my prayers. But listen. I have been deceived—hurried on, I might say, by others, but also, and far more, by my own mad and blinded heart—deceived, hurried on, to wrong you and to belie myself. My shame burns into me when I think that I could have inflicted on you the just anger of your family—linked you to my own ruined fortunes—my own——"

"Your own generous, loving heart!—that is all I asked!" cried Frank. "Cease, cease—that heart is mine still!"

Tears gushed from the Italian's eyes.

"Englishman, I never loved you; this heart was

dead to you, and it will be dead to all else for ever. Farewell. You will forget me sooner than you think for—sooner than I shall forget you—as a friend, as a brother—if brothers had natures as tender and as kind as yours! Now, my lord, will you give me your arm? I would join the Count."

"Stay—one word, madame," said Frank, very pale, and through his set teeth, but calmly, and with a pride on his brow which had never before dignified its habitual careless expression—"one word. I may not be worthy of you in anything else—but an honest love, that never doubted, never suspected—that would have clung to you though all the world were against; such a love makes the meanest man of worth. One word, frank and open. By all that you hold most sacred in your creed, did you speak the truth when you said that you never loved me?"

Beatrice bent down her head; she was abashed before this manly nature that she had so deceived, and perhaps till then undervalued.

"Pardon, pardon," she said, in reluctant accents, half-choked by the rising of a sob.

At her hesitation, Frank's face lighted as if with sudden hope. She raised her eyes, and saw the change in him, then glanced where Leonard stood, mournful and motionless. She shivered and added, firmly—

"Yes—pardon; for I spoke the truth; and I had no heart to give. It might have been as wax to another—it was of granite to you." She paused, and muttered inly—"Granite, and—broken!"

Frank said not a word more. He stood rooted to the spot, not even gazing after Beatrice as she passed on, leaning on the arm of Lord L'Estrange. He then walked resolutely away, and watched the boat that the men were now lowering from the side of the vessel. Beatrice stopped when she came near the place where Violante stood, answering in agitated whispers her father's anxious questions. As she stopped she leaned more heavily upon Harley. "It is your arm that trembles now, Lord L'Estrange," said she, with a mournful smile, and, quitting him ere he could answer, she bowed down her head meekly before Violante. "You have pardoned me already," she said, in a tone that reached only the girl's ear, "and my last words shall not be of the past. I see your future spread bright before me under those steadfast stars. Love still; hope and trust. These are the last words of her who will soon die to the world. Fair maid, they are prophetic!"

Violante shrunk back to her father's breast, and there hid her glowing face, resigning her hand to Beatrice, who pressed it to her bosom. The Marchesa then came back to Harley, and disappeared with him in the interior of the vessel.

When Harley again came on deck, he seemed much flurried and disturbed. He kept aloof from the Duke and Violante, and was the last to enter the boat, that was now lowered into the water.

As he and his companions reached the land, they saw the vessel in movement, gliding slowly down the river.

"Courage, Leonard, courage!" murmured Harley. "You grieve, and nobly. But you have shunned the worst and most vulgar deceit in civilised life; you have not simulated love. Better that yon poor lady should be, awhile, the sufferer from a harsh truth, than the eternal martyr of a flattering lie! Alas, my Leonard! with the love of the poet's dream are linked only the Graces; with the love of the human heart come the awful Fates!"

"My lord, poets do not dream when they love. You will learn how the feelings are deep in proportion as the fancies are vivid, when you read that confession of genius and woe which I have left in your hands."

Leonard turned away. Harley's gaze followed him with inquiring interest, and suddenly encountered the soft, dark, grateful eyes of Violante. "The Fates, the Fates!" murmured Harley.

CHAPTER IX.

We are at Norwood in the sage's drawing-room. Violante has long since retired to rest. Harley, who had accompanied the father and daughter to their home, is still conversing with the former.

"Indeed, my dear duke——" said Harley.

"Hush, hush! *Diavolo*, don't call me Duke yet; I am at home here once more as Dr Riccabocca."

"My dear doctor, then, allow me to assure you that you overrate my claim to your thanks. Your old friends, Leonard and Frank Hazeldean, must come in for their share. Nor is the faithful Giacomo to be forgotten."

"Continue your explanation."

"In the first place, I learned, through Frank, that one Baron Levy, a certain fashionable money-lender, and general ministrant to the affairs of fine gentlemen, was just about to purchase a yacht from Lord Spendquick on behalf of the Count. A short interview with Spendquick enabled me to outbid the usurer, and conclude a bargain, by which the yacht became mine;—a promise to assist Spendquick in extricating himself from the claws of the money-lender (which I trust to

do by reconciling him with his father, who is a man of liberality and sense), made Spendquick readily connive at my scheme for outwitting the enemy. He allowed Levy to suppose that the Count might take possession of the vessel; but affecting an engagement, and standing out for terms, postponed the final settlement of the purchase-money till the next day. I was thus master of the vessel, which I felt sure was destined to serve Peschiera's infamous design. But it was my business not to alarm the Count's suspicions: I therefore permitted the pirate crew he had got together to come on board. I knew I could get rid of them when necessary. Meanwhile, Frank undertook to keep close to the Count until he could see and cage within his lodgings the servant whom Peschiera had commissioned to attend his sister. If I could but apprehend this servant, I had a sanguine hope that I could discover and free your daughter before Peschiera could even profane her with his presence. But Frank, alas! was no pupil of Machiavelli. Perhaps the Count detected his secret thoughts under his open countenance; perhaps merely wished to get rid of a companion very much in his way; but, at all events, he contrived to elude our young friend as cleverly as you or I could have done—told him that Beatrice herself was at Roehampton—had borrowed the Count's carriage to go there—volunteered to take Frank to the house—took him. Frank found himself in a drawing-room; and after waiting a few minutes, while the Count went out on pretence of seeing his sister—in pirouetted a certain distinguished opera-

dancer! Meanwhile the Count was fast back on the road to London, and Frank had to return as he could. He then hunted for the Count everywhere, and saw him no more. It was late in the day when Frank found me out with this news. I became seriously alarmed. Peschiera might perhaps learn my counter scheme with the yacht—or he might postpone sailing until he had terrified or entangled Violante into some—in short, everything was to be dreaded from a man of the Count's temper. I had no clue to the place to which your daughter was taken—no excuse to arrest Peschiera—no means even of learning where he was. He had not returned to Mivart's. The Police were at fault, and useless, except in one valuable piece of information. They told me where some of your countrymen, whom Peschiera's perfidy had sent into exile, were to be found. I commissioned Giacomo to seek these men out, and induce them to man the vessel. It might be necessary, should Peschiera or his confidential servants come aboard, after we had expelled or drawn off the pirate crew, that they should find Italians whom they might well mistake for their own hirelings. To these foreigners I added some English sailors who had before served in the same vessel, and on whom Spendquick assured me I could rely. Still these precautions only availed in case Peschiera should resolve to sail, and defer till then all machinations against his captives. While, amidst my fears and uncertainties, I was struggling still to preserve presence of mind, and rapidly discussing with the Austrian Prince if any other steps could be taken, or

if our sole resource was to repair to the vessel and take the chance of what might ensue, Leonard suddenly and quietly entered my room. You know his countenance, in which joy or sadness is not betrayed so much by the evidence of the passions as by variations in the intellectual expression. It was but by the clearer brow and the steadier eye that I saw he had good tidings to impart."

"Ah," said Riccabocca—for so, obeying his own request, we will yet call the sage—"ah, I early taught that young man the great lesson inculcated by Helvetius. 'All our errors arise from our ignorance or our passions.' Without ignorance, and without passions, we should be serene, all-penetrating intelligences."

"Mopsticks," quoth Harley, "have neither ignorance nor passions; but as for their intelligence——"

"Pshaw!" interrupted Riccabocca—"Proceed."

"Leonard had parted from us some hours before. I had commissioned him to call at Madame di Negra's, and, as he was familiarly known to her servants, seek to obtain quietly all the information he could collect, and, at all events, procure (what in my haste I had failed to do) the name and description of the man who had driven her out in the morning, and make what use he judged best of every hint he could gather or glean that might aid our researches. Leonard only succeeded in learning the name and description of the coachman, whom he recognised as one Beppo, to whom she had often given orders in his presence. None could say where she then could be found, if not at the Count's hotel. Leonard went next to that hotel. The man

had not been there all the day. While revolving what next he should do, his eye caught sight of your intended son-in-law, gliding across the opposite side of the street. One of those luminous, inspiring conjectures, which never occur to you philosophers, had from the first guided Leonard to believe that Randal Leslie was mixed up in this villanous affair."

"Ha! He!" cried Riccabocca. "Impossible! For what interest?—what object?"

"I cannot tell; neither could Leonard; but we had both formed the same conjecture. Brief:—Leonard resolved to follow Randal Leslie, and track all his movements. He did then follow him, unobserved, and at a distance—first to Audley Egerton's house—then to Eaton Square—thence to a house in Bruton Street, which Leonard ascertained to be Baron Levy's. Suspicious that, my dear sage?"

"*Diavolo*—yes!" said Riccabocca, thoughtfully.

"At Levy's, Randal stayed till dusk. He then came out, with his cat-like, stealthy step, and walked quickly into the neighbourhood of Leicester Square. Leonard saw him enter one of those small hotels which are appropriated to foreigners. Wild outlandish fellows were loitering about the door and in the street. Leonard divined that the Count, or the Count's confidants, were there."

"If that can be proved," cried Riccabocca—"if Randal could have been thus in communication with Peschiera—could have connived at such perfidy—I am released from my promise. Oh, to prove it!"

"Proof will come later, if we are on the right track. Let me go on. While waiting near the door of this hotel, Beppo himself, the very man Leonard was in search of, came forth, and, after speaking a few words to some of the loitering foreigners, walked briskly towards Piccadilly. Leonard here resigned all further heed of Leslie, and gave chase to Beppo, whom he recognised at a glance. Coming up to him, he said, quietly, 'I have a letter for the Marchesa di Negra. She told me I was to send it to her by you. I have been searching for you the whole day.' The man fell into the trap, and the more easily, because—as he since owned in excuse for a simplicity, which, I daresay, weighed on his conscience more than any of the thousand-and-one crimes he may have committed in the course of his illustrious life—he had been employed by the Marchesa as a spy upon Leonard, and, with an Italian's acumen in affairs of the heart, detected her secret."

"What secret?" asked the innocent sage.

"Her love for the handsome young poet. I betray that secret, in order to give her some slight excuse for becoming Peschiera's tool. She believed Leonard to be in love with your daughter, and jealousy urged her to treason. Violante, no doubt, will explain this to you. Well, the man fell into the trap. 'Give me the letter, Signore, and quick.'

"'It is at an hotel close by; come there, and you will have a guinea for your trouble.'

"So Leonard walked our gentleman into my hotel;

and having taken him into my dressing-room, turned the key, and there left him. On learning this capture, the Prince and myself hastened to see our prisoner. He was at first sullen and silent; but when the Prince disclosed his rank and name (you know the mysterious terror the meaner Italians feel for an Austrian magnate), his countenance changed, and his courage fell. What with threats, and what with promises, we soon obtained all that we sought to know; and an offered bribe, which I calculated at ten times the amount the rogue could ever expect to receive from his spendthrift master, finally bound him cheerfully to our service, soul and body. Thus we learned the dismal place to which your noble daughter had been so perfidiously ensnared. We learned also that the Count had not yet visited her, hoping much from the effect that prolonged incarceration might have in weakening her spirit and inducing her submission. Peschiera was to go to the house at midnight, thence to transport her to the vessel. Beppo had received orders to bring the carriage to Leicester Square, where Peschiera would join him. The Count (as Leonard surmised) had taken skulking refuge at the hotel in which Randal Leslie had disappeared. The Prince, Leonard, Frank (who was then in the hotel), and myself, held a short council. Should we go at once to the house, and, by the help of the police, force an entrance, and rescue your daughter? This was a very hazardous resource. The abode, which, at various times, had served for the hiding-place of men haunted by the law, abounded, according to our informant, in

subterranean vaults and secret passages, and had more than one outlet on the river. At our first summons at the door, therefore, the ruffians within might not only escape themselves, but carry off their prisoner. The door was strong, and before our entrance could be forced, all trace of her we sought might be lost. Again, too, the Prince was desirous of bringing Peschiera's guilty design home to him—anxious to be able to state to the Emperor, and to the great minister, his kinsman, that he himself had witnessed the Count's vile abuse of the Emperor's permission to wed your daughter. In short, while I only thought of Violante, the Prince thought also of her father's recall to his dukedom. Yet still to leave Violante in that terrible house, even for an hour, a few minutes, subjected to the actual presence of Peschiera, unguarded save by the feeble and false woman who had betrayed and might still desert her—how contemplate that fearful risk? What might not happen in the interval between Peschiera's visit to the house and his appearance with his victim on the vessel? An idea flashed on me—Beppo was to conduct the Count to the house; if I could accompany Beppo in disguise—enter the house—myself be present?—I rushed back to our informant, now become our agent; I found the plan still more feasible than I had at first supposed. Beppo had asked the Count's permission to bring with him a brother accustomed to the sea, and who wished to quit England. I might personate that brother. You know that the Italian language, in most of its dialects and varieties of *patois*

—Genoese, Piedmontese, Venetian—is as familiar to me as Addison's English! Alas! rather more so. Presto! the thing was settled. I felt my heart, from that moment, as light as a feather, and my sense as keen as the dart which a feather wings. My plans now were formed in a breath, and explained in a sentence. It was right that you should be present on board the vessel, not only to witness your foe's downfall, but to receive your child in a father's arms. Leonard set out to Norwood for you, cautioned not to define too precisely for what object you were wanted, till on board.

"Frank, accompanied by Beppo (for there was yet time for these preparations before midnight), repaired to the yacht, taking Giacomo by the way. There our new ally, familiar to most of that piratical crew, and sanctioned by the presence of Frank, as the Count's friend and prospective brother-in-law, told Peschiera's hirelings that they were to quit the vessel, and wait on shore under Giacomo's auspices, till further orders; and as soon as the decks were cleared of these ruffians (save a few left to avoid suspicion, and who were afterwards safely stowed down in the hold), and as soon as Giacomo had lodged his convoy in a public-house, where he quitted them, drinking his health over unlimited rations of grog, your inestimable servant quietly shipped on board the Italians pressed into the service, and Frank took charge of the English sailors.

"The Prince, promising to be on board in due time, then left me, to make arrangements for his journey to

Vienna with the dawn. I hastened to a masquerade warehouse, where, with the help of an ingenious stage-wright artificer, I disguised myself into a most thorough-paced-looking cut-throat, and then waited the return of my friend Beppo with the most perfect confidence."

"Yet, if that rascal had played false, all these precautions were lost. *Cospetto!* you were not wise," said the prudent philosopher.

"Very likely not. You would have been so wise, that by this time your daughter would have been lost to you for ever."

"But why not employ the police?"

"First—Because I had already employed them to little purpose. Secondly—Because I no longer wanted them. Thirdly—Because to use them for my final catastrophe, would be to drag your name, and your daughter's, perhaps, before a police-court; at all events before the tribunal of public gossip. And lastly—Because having decided upon the proper punishment, it had too much of equity to be quite consistent with law; and in forcibly seizing a man's person, and shipping him off to Norway, my police would have been sadly in the way. Certainly my plan rather savours of Lope de Vega than of Blackstone. However, you see success atones for all irregularities. I resume:—Beppo came back in time to narrate all the arrangements that had been made, and to inform me that a servant from the Count had come on board just as our new crew were assembled there, to order the boat to be at the place where we found it. The servant, it

was deemed prudent to detain and secure. Giacomo undertook to manage the boat. I am nearly at the close of my story. Sure of my disguise, I got on the coach-box with Beppo. The Count arrived at the spot appointed, and did not even honour myself with a question or glance. 'Your brother?' he said to Beppo; 'one might guess that; he has the family likeness. Not a handsome race yours! Drive on.'

"We arrived at the house. I dismounted to open the carriage-door. The Count gave me one look.

"'Beppo says you have known the sea.'

"'Excellency, yes. I am a Genoese.'

"'Ha! how is that? Beppo is a Lombard.'—Admire the readiness with which I redeemed my blunder:

"'Excellency, it pleased Heaven that Beppo should be born in Lombardy, and then to remove my respected parents to Genoa, at which city they were so kindly treated, that my mother, in common gratitude, was bound to increase its population. It was all she could do, poor woman. You see she did her best.'

"The Count smiled, and said no more. The door opened—I followed him; your daughter can tell you the rest."

"And you risked your life in that den of miscreants! Noble friend!"

"Risked my life—no; but I risked the Count's. There was one moment when my hand was on my trigger, and my soul very near the sin of justifiable homicide. But my tale is done. The Count is now

on the river, and will soon be on the salt seas,—though not bound to Norway as I had first intended. I could not inflict that frigid voyage on his sister. So the men have orders to cruise about for six days, keeping aloof from shore, and they will then land the Count and the Marchesa, by boat, on the French coast. That delay will give time for the Prince to arrive at Vienna before the Count could follow him."

"Would he have that audacity?"

"Do him more justice! Audacity, faith! he does not want for that. But I dreaded not his appearance at Vienna with such evidence against him. I dreaded his encountering the Prince on the road, and forcing a duel, before his character was so blasted that the Prince could refuse it;—and the Count is a dead shot of course;—all such men are!"

"He will return, and you——"

"I!—Oh, never fear: he has had enough of me. And now, my dear friend—now that Violante is safe once more under your own roof—now that my honoured mother must long ere this have been satisfied by Leonard, who left us to go to her, that our success has been achieved without danger, and, what she will value almost as much, without scandal—now that your foe is powerless as a reed floating on the water towards its own rot, and the Prince Von —— is perhaps about to enter his carriage on the road to Dover, charged with the mission of restoring to Italy her worthiest son—let me dismiss you to your own happy slumbers, and allow me to wrap myself in my cloak, and snatch a

short sleep on the sofa, till yonder grey dawn has mellowed into riper day. My eyes are heavy, and if you stay here three minutes longer, I shall be out of reach of hearing — in the land of dreams. *Buona notte!*"

"But there is a bed prepared for you."

Harley shook his head in dissent, and composed himself at length on the sofa.

Riccabocca bending, wrapped the cloak round his guest, kissed him on the forehead, and crept out of the room to rejoin Jemima, who still sat up for him, nervously anxious to learn from him those explanations which her considerate affection would not allow her to ask from the agitated and exhausted Violante. "Not in bed!" cried the sage, on seeing her. "Have you no feelings of compassion for my son that is to be? Just, too, when there is a reasonable probability that we can afford a son?"

Riccabocca here laughed merrily, and his wife threw herself on his shoulder, and cried for joy.

But no sleep fell on the lids of Harley L'Estrange. He started up when his host had left him, and paced the apartment, with noiseless but rapid strides. All whim and levity had vanished from his face, which, by the light of the dawn, seemed death-like pale. On that pale face there was all the struggle, and all the anguish of passion.

"These arms have clasped her," he murmured; "these lips have inhaled her breath. I am under the same roof, and she is saved — saved evermore from

danger and from penury, and for ever divided from me. Courage, courage! Oh, honour, duty; and thou, dark memory of the past—thou that didst pledge love at least to a grave—support—defend me! Can I be so weak!"

The sun was in the wintry skies, when Harley stole from the house. No one was stirring except Giacomo, who stood by the threshold of the door, which he had just unbarred, feeding the house-dog. "Good day," said the servant, smiling. "The dog has not been of much use, but I don't think the Padrone will henceforth grudge him a breakfast. I shall take him to Italy, and marry him there, in the hope of improving the breed of our native Lombard dogs."

"Ah!" said Harley, "you will soon leave our cold shores. May sunshine settle on you all." He paused, and looked up at the closed windows wistfully.

"The Signorina sleeps there," said Giacomo, in a husky voice, "just over the room in which you slept."

"I knew it," muttered Harley. "An instinct told me of it. Open the gate; I must go home. My excuses to your lord and to all."

He turned a deaf ear to Giacomo's entreaties to stay till at least the Signorina was up—the Signorina whom he had saved. Without trusting himself to speak further, he quitted the demesne, and walked with swift strides towards London.

CHAPTER X.

HARLEY had not long reached his hotel, and was still seated before his untasted breakfast, when Mr Randal Leslie was announced. Randal, who was in the firm belief that Violante was now on the wide seas with Peschiera, entered, looking the very personation of anxiety and fatigue. For, like the great Cardinal Richelieu, Randal had learned the art how to make good use of his own delicate and somewhat sickly aspect. The Cardinal, when intent on some sanguinary scheme, requiring unusual vitality and vigour, contrived to make himself look a harmless sufferer at death's door. And Randal, whose nervous energies could at that moment have whirled him from one end of this huge metropolis to the other, with a speed that would have outstripped a prize pedestrian, now sank into a chair with a jaded weariness that no mother could have seen without compassion. He seemed since the last night to have galloped towards the last stage of consumption.

"Have you discovered no trace, my lord? Speak, speak!"

"Speak—certainly. I am too happy to relieve your mind, Mr Leslie. What fools we were? Ha! ha!"

"Fools—how?" faltered Randal.

"Of course; the young lady was at her father's house all the time."

"Eh! what?"

"And is there now."

"It is not possible!" said Randal, in the hollow dreamy tone of a somnambulist. "At her father's house—at Norwood! Are you sure?"

"Sure."

Randal made a desperate and successful effort at self-control. "Heaven be praised!" he cried. "And just as I had begun to suspect the Count—the Marchesa: for I find that neither of them slept at home last night; and Levy told me that the Count had written to him, requesting the Baron to discharge his bills, as he should be for some time absent from England."

"Indeed! Well, that is nothing to us—very much to Baron Levy, if he executes his commission, and discharges the bills. What! are you going already?"

"Do you ask such a question? How can I stay? I must go to Norwood—must see Violante with my own eyes! Forgive my emotion—I—I——"

Randal snatched at his hat and hurried away. The low scornful laugh of Harley followed him as he went.

"I have no more doubt of his guilt than Leonard has. Violante at least shall not be the prize of that thin-lipped knave. What strange fascination can he possess, that he should thus bind to him the two men I value most—Audley Egerton and Alphonso di Serrano? Both so wise too!—one in books, one in action.

And both suspicious men! While I, so imprudently trustful and frank—Ah! that is the reason; our natures are antipathetic; cunning, simulation, falsehood, I have no mercy, no pardon for these. Woe to all hypocrites if I were a Grand Inquisitor!"

"Mr Richard Avenel," said the waiter, throwing open the door.

Harley caught at the arm of the chair on which he sate, and grasped it nervously; while his eyes became fixed intently on the form of the gentleman who now advanced into the room. He rose with an effort.

"Mr Avenel!" he said, falteringly. "Did I hear your name aright? Avenel?"

"Richard Avenel, at your service, my lord," answered Dick. "My family is not unknown to you; and I am not ashamed of my family, though my parents were small Lansmere tradesfolks. And I am—a-hem!—a citizen of the world, and well-to-do!" added Dick, dropping his kid gloves into his hat, and then placing the hat on the table, with the air of an old acquaintance who wishes to make himself at home.

Lord L'Estrange bowed, and said, as he reseated himself (Dick being firmly seated already)—"You are most welcome, sir; and if there be anything I can do for one of your name——"

"Thank you, my lord," interrupted Dick. "I want nothing of any man. A bold word to say; but I say it. Nevertheless, I should not have presumed to call on your lordship, unless, indeed, you had done me the honour to call first at my house, Eaton Square,

No.***.—I should not have presumed to call, if it had not been on business:—public business, I may say—NATIONAL business!"

Harley bowed again. A faint smile flitted for a moment to his lip, but, vanishing, gave way to a mournful, absent expression of countenance, as he scanned the handsome features before him, and, perhaps, masculine and bold though they were, still discovered something of a family likeness to one whose beauty had once been his ideal of female loveliness; for suddenly he stretched forth his hand, and said, with more than his usual cordial sweetness, "Business, or not business, let us speak to each other as friends—for the sake of a name that takes me back to Lansmere—to my youth. I listen to you with interest."

Richard Avenel, much surprised by this unexpected kindliness, and touched, he knew not why, by the soft and melancholy tone of Harley's voice, warmly pressed the hand held out to him; and, seized with a rare fit of shyness, coloured, and coughed, and hemmed, and looked first down, then aside, before he could find the words which were generally ready enough at his command:

"You are very good, Lord L'Estrange; nothing can be handsomer. I feel it here, my lord," striking his buff waistcoat—"I do, 'pon my honour. But not to waste your time (time's money), I come to the point. It is about the borough of Lansmere. Your family interest is very strong in that borough. But excuse me if I say that I don't think you are aware that I

too have cooked up a pretty considerable interest on the other side. No offence—opinions are free. And the popular tide runs strong with us—I mean with *me*, at the impending crisis—that is, at the next election. Now, I have a great respect for the Earl, your father; and so have those who brought me into the world;—my father, John, was always a regular good Blue;—and my respect for yourself since I came into this room has gone up in the market—a very great rise indeed—considerable. So I should just like to see if we could set our heads together, and settle the borough between us two, in a snug private way, as public men ought to do when they get together—nobody else by, and no necessity for that sort of humbug—which is so common in this rotten old country. Eh, my lord?"

"Mr Avenel," said Harley, slowly, recovering himself from the abstraction with which he had listened to Dick's earlier sentences, "I fear I do not quite understand you; but I have no other interest in the next election for the borough of Lansmere, than as may serve one whom, whatever be your politics, you must acknowledge to be——"

"A humbug!"

"Mr Avenel, you cannot mean the person I mean. I speak of one of the first statesmen of our time—of Mr Audley Egerton—of——"

"A stiff-necked pompous——"

"My earliest and dearest friend."

The rebuke, though gently said, sufficed to silence

Dick for a moment; and when he spoke again, it was in an altered tone.

"I beg your pardon, my lord, I am sure. Of course I can say nothing disrespectful of your friend;—very sorry that he is your friend. In that case, I am almost afraid that nothing is to be done. But Mr Audley Egerton has not a chance. Let me convince you of this." And Dick pulled out a little book, bound neatly in red.

"Canvass-book, my lord. I am no aristocrat. I don't pretend to carry a free and independent constituency in my breeches-pocket. Heaven forbid! But, as a practical man of business—what I do is done properly. Just look at this book. Well kept, eh? Names, promises, inclinations, public opinions, and private interests of every individual Lansmere elector! Now, as one man of honour to another, I show you this book, and I think you will see that we have a clear majority of at least eighty votes as against Mr Egerton."

"That is your view of the question," said Harley, taking the book and glancing over the names catalogued and ticketed therein. But his countenance became serious as he recognised many names, familiar to his boyhood as those of important electors on the Lansmere side, and which he now found transferred to the hostile. "But surely there are persons here in whom you deceive yourself—old friends of my family—stanch supporters of our party."

"Exactly so. But this new question has turned all

old things topsy-turvy. No relying on any friend of yours. No reliance except in this book!" said Dick, slapping the red cover with calm but ominous emphasis.

"Now what I want to propose is this: Don't let the Lansmere interest be beaten; it would vex the old Earl—go to his heart, I am sure."

Harley nodded.

"And the Lansmere interest need not be beaten, if you'll put up another man instead of this red-tapist. (Beg pardon.) You see I only want to get in one man—you want to get in another. Why not? Now there's a smart youth—connection of Mr Egerton's,—Randal Leslie. I have no objection to him, though he is of your colours. Withdraw Mr Egerton, and I'll withdraw my second man before it comes to the poll; and so we shall halve the borough slick between us. That's the way to do business, eh, my lord?"

"Randal Leslie! Oh, you wish to bring in Mr Leslie? But he stands with Egerton, not against him."

"Ah!" said Dick, smiling, as if to himself, "so I hear; and we could bring him in over Egerton without saying a word to you. But all our family respect yours, and so I have wished to do the thing handsome and open. Let the Earl and your party be content with young Leslie."

"Young Leslie has spoken to you?"

"Not as to my coming here. Oh no—that's a secret—private and confidential, my lord. And now, to make matters still more smooth, I propose that my man shall be one to your lordship's own heart. I find you have been

very kind to my nephew ;—does you credit, my lord ;—a wonderful young man, though I say it. I never guessed there was so much in him. Yet all the time he was in my house, he had in his desk the very sketch of an invention that is now saving me from ruin—from positive ruin—Baron Levy—the King's Bench—and almighty smash ! Now, such a young man ought to be in Parliament. I like to bring forward a relation ; that is, when he does one credit ; 'tis human nature and sacred ties —one's own flesh and blood ; and besides, one hand rubs the other, and one leg helps on the other, and relations get on best in the world when they pull together ; that is, supposing that they are the proper sort of relations, and pull one on, not down. I had once thought of standing for Lansmere myself—thought of it very lately. The country wants men like me—I know that ; but I have an idea that I had better see to my own business. The country may, or may not, do without me, stupid old thing that she is ! But my mill and my new engines, there is no doubt that they cannot do without me. In short, as we are quite alone, and, as I said before, there's no kind of necessity for that sort of humbug which exists when other people are present, provide elsewhere for Mr Egerton, whom I hate like poison—I have a right to do that, I suppose, without offence to your lordship—and the two younkers, Leonard Fairfield and Randal Leslie, shall be members for the free and independent borough of Lansmere !"

"But does Leonard wish to come into Parliament?"

"No : he says not ; but that's nonsense. If your

lordship will just signify your wish that he should not lose this noble opportunity to raise himself in life, and get something handsome out of the nation, I'm sure he owes you too much to hesitate—'specially when 'tis to his own advantage. And, besides, one of us Avenels ought to be in Parliament. And if I have not the time and learning, and so forth, and he has, why, it stands to reason that he should be the man. And if he can do something for me one day—not that I want anything—but still a Baronetcy or so would be a compliment to British Industry, and be appreciated as such by myself and the public at large—I say, if he could do something of that sort, it would keep up the whole family; and if he can't, why, I'll forgive him."

"Avenel," said Harley, with that familiar and gracious charm of manner which few ever could resist—"Avenel, if, as a great personal favour to myself—to me your fellow-townsman (I was born at Lansmere)—if I asked you to forego your grudge against Audley Egerton, whatever that grudge be, and not oppose his election, while our party would not oppose your nephew's—could you not oblige me? Come, for the sake of dear Lansmere, and all the old kindly feelings between your family and mine, say 'Yes—so shall it be.'"

Richard Avenel was almost melted. He turned away his face; but there suddenly rose to his recollection the scornful brow of Audley Egerton, the lofty contempt with which *he*, then the worshipful Mayor of Screwstown, had been shown out of the Minister's office-room; and, the blood rushing over his cheeks, he stamped his

foot on the floor, and exclaimed, angrily, "No; I swore that Audley Egerton should smart for his insolence to me, as sure as my name be Richard Avenel; and all the soft soap in the world will not wash out that oath. So there is nothing for it but for you to withdraw that man, or for me to defeat him. And I would do so, ay —and in the way that could most gall him, if it cost me half my fortune. But it will not cost that," said Dick, cooling, "nor anything like it; for when the popular tide runs in one's favour, 'tis astonishing how cheap an election may be. It will cost *him* enough though, and all for nothing—worse than nothing. Think of it, my lord."

"I will, Mr Avenel. And I say, in my turn, that my friendship is as strong as your hate; and that if it costs me, not half, but my whole fortune, Audley Egerton shall come in without a shilling of expense to himself, should we once decide that he stand the contest."

"Very well, my lord—very well," said Dick, stiffly, and drawing on his kid-gloves; "we'll see if the aristocracy is always to ride over the free choice of the people in this way. But the people are roused, my lord. The March of Enlightenment is commenced—the Schoolmaster is abroad, and the British Lion——"

"Nobody here but ourselves, my dear Avenel. Is not this rather what you call—*humbug?*"

Dick started, stared, coloured, and then burst out laughing—"Give us your hand again, my lord. You are a good fellow, *that* you are. And for your sake——"

"You'll not oppose Egerton?"

"Tooth and nail—tooth and nail!" cried Dick, clapping his hands to his ears, and fairly running out of the room.

There passed over Harley's countenance that change so frequent to it—more frequent, indeed, to the gay children of the world than those of consistent tempers and uniform habits might suppose. There is many a man whom we call friend, and whose face seems familiar to us as our own; yet, could we but take a glimpse of him when we leave his presence, and he sinks back into his chair alone, we should sigh to see how often the smile on the frankest lip is but a bravery of the drill, only worn when on parade.

What thoughts did the visit of Richard Avenel bequeath to Harley? It were hard to define them.

In his place, an Audley Egerton would have taken some comfort from the visit—would have murmured, "Thank Heaven! I have not to present to the world that terrible man as my brother-in-law." But probably Harley had escaped, in his reverie, from Richard Avenel altogether. Even as the slightest incident in the daytime causes our dreams at night, but is itself clean forgotten—so the name, so the look of the visitor, might have sufficed but to influence a vision—as remote from its casual suggester, as what we call real life is from that life much more real, that we imagine, or remember, in the haunted chambers of the brain. For what *is* real life? How little the things actually doing around us affect the springs of our sorrow or joy; but the life

which our dulness calls romance—the sentiment, the remembrance, the hope, and the fear, that are never seen in the toil of our hands—never heard in the jargon on our lips ;—from that life all spin, as the spider from its entrails, the web by which we hang in the sunbeam, or glide out of sight into the shelter of home.

"I must not think," said Harley, rousing himself with a sigh, "either of past or present. Let me hurry on to some fancied future. 'Happiest are the marriages,' said the French philosopher, and still says many a sage, 'in which man asks only the mild companion, and woman but the calm protector.' I will go to Helen."

He rose ; and as he was about to lock up his escritoire, he remembered the papers which Leonard had requested him to read. He took them from their deposit, with a careless hand, intending to carry them with him to his father's house. But as his eye fell upon the characters, the hand suddenly trembled, and he recoiled some paces, as if struck by a violent blow. Then, gazing more intently on the writing, a low cry broke from his lips. He reseated himself, and began to read.

CHAPTER XI.

RANDAL—with many misgivings at Lord L'Estrange's tone, in which he was at no loss to detect a latent irony—proceeded to Norwood. He found Riccabocca exceedingly cold and distant. But he soon brought that sage to communicate the suspicions which Lord L'Estrange had instilled into his mind, and these Randal was as speedily enabled to dispel. He accounted at once for his visits to Levy and Peschiera. Naturally he had sought Levy, an acquaintance of his own—nay, of Audley Egerton's; but whom he knew to be professionally employed by the Count. He had succeeded in extracting from the Baron, Peschiera's suspicious change of lodgment from Mivart's Hotel to the purlieus of Leicester Square;—had called there on the Count—forced an entrance—openly accused him of abstracting Violante; high words had passed between them—even a challenge. Randal produced a note from a military friend of his, whom he had sent to the Count an hour after quitting the hotel. This note stated that arrangements were made for a meeting near Lord's Cricket Ground, at seven o'clock the next morning. Randal then submitted to Riccabocca another

formal memorandum from the same warlike friend—to the purport that Randal and himself had repaired to the ground, and no Count been forthcoming. It must be owned that Randal had taken all suitable precautions to clear himself. Such a man is not to blame for want of invention, if he be sometimes doomed to fail.

"I then, much alarmed," continued Randal, "hastened to Baron Levy, who informed me that the Count had written him word that he should be for some time absent from England. Rushing thence, in despair, to your friend Lord L'Estrange, I heard that your daughter was safe with you. And though, as I have just proved, I would have risked my life against so notorious a duellist as the Count, on the mere chance of preserving Violante from his supposed designs, I am rejoiced to think that she had no need of my unskilful arm. But how and why can the Count have left England after accepting a challenge? A man so sure of his weapon, too—reputed to be as fearless of danger as he is blunt in conscience. Explain; —you who know mankind so well—explain. I cannot."

The philosopher could not resist the pleasure of narrating the detection and humiliation of his foe—the wit, ingenuity, and readiness of his friend. So Randal learned, by little and little, the whole drama of the preceding night. He saw, then, that the exile had all reasonable hope of speedy restoration to rank and wealth. Violante, indeed, would be a brilliant

prize—too brilliant, perhaps, for Randal—but not to be sacrificed without an effort. Therefore wringing convulsively the hand of his meditated father-in-law, and turning away his head as if to conceal his emotions, the ingenuous young suitor faltered forth—"That now Dr Riccabocca was so soon to vanish into the Duke di Serrano, he—Randal Leslie of Rood, born a gentleman, indeed, but of fallen fortunes—had no right to claim the promise which had been given to him while a father had cause to fear for a daughter's future; with the fear ceased the promise. Might Heaven bless father and daughter both!"

This address touched both the heart and honour of the exile. Randal Leslie knew his man. And though, before Randal's visit, Riccabocca was not quite so much a philosopher, but what he would have been well pleased to have found himself released, by proof of the young man's treachery, from an alliance below the rank to which he had all chance of early restoration; yet no Spaniard was ever more tenacious of plighted word than this inconsistent pupil of the profound Florentine. And Randal's probity being now clear to him, he repeated, with stately formalities, his previous offer of Violante's hand.

"But," still falteringly sighed the provident and far-calculating Randal—"but your only child, your sole heiress! Oh, might not your consent to such a marriage (if known before your recall) jeopardise your cause? Your lands, your principalities, to devolve on the child of an humble Englishman! I dare not

believe it. Ah, would Violante were not your heiress!"

"A noble wish," said Riccabocca, smiling blandly, "and one that the Fates will realise. Cheer up; Violante will not be my heiress."

"Ah," cried Randal, drawing a long breath—"ah, what do I hear!"

"Hist! I shall soon a second time be a father. And, to judge by the unerring researches of writers upon that most interesting of all subjects, parturitive science, I shall be the father of a son. He will, of course, succeed to the titles of Serrano. And Violante——"

"Will have nothing, I suppose!" exclaimed Randal, trying his best to look overjoyed, till he had got his paws out of the trap into which he had so incautiously thrust them.

"Nay, her portion by our laws—to say nothing of my affection—would far exceed the ordinary dower which the daughters of London merchants bring to the sons of British peers. Whoever marries Violante, provided I regain my estates, must submit to the cares which the poets assure us ever attend on wealth."

"Oh!" groaned Randal, as if already bowed beneath the cares, and sympathising with the poets.

"And now, let me present you to your betrothed."

Although poor Randal had been remorselessly hurried along what Schiller calls the "gamut of feeling," during the last three minutes, down to the deep chord of despair at the abrupt intelligence that his betrothed was no heiress after all; thence ascending to vibrations

of pleasant doubt as the unborn usurper of her rights, according to the prophecies of parturitive science; and lastly, swelling into a concord of all sweet thoughts at the assurance that, come what might, she would be a wealthier bride than a peer's son could discover in the matrimonial Potosi of Lombard Street; still the tormented lover was not there allowed to repose his exhausted though ravished soul. For, at the idea of personally confronting the destined bride—whose very existence had almost vanished from his mind's eye, amidst the golden showers that it saw falling divinely round her—Randal was suddenly reminded of the exceeding bluntness with which, at their last interview, it had been his policy to announce his suit, and of the necessity of an impromptu *falsetto* suited to the new variations that tossed him again to and fro on the merciless gamut. However, he could not recoil from her father's proposition, though, in order to prepare Riccabocca for Violante's representation, he confessed pathetically that his impatience to obtain her consent, and baffle Peschiera, had made him appear a rude and presumptuous wooer. The philosopher, who was disposed to believe one kind of courtship to be much the same as another, in cases where the result of all courtships was once predetermined—smiled benignly, patted Randal's thin cheek with a "Pooh, pooh, *pazzie!*" and left the room to summon Violante.

"If knowledge be power," soliloquised Randal, "ability is certainly good luck, as Miss Edgeworth shows in that story of Murad the Unlucky, which I

read at Eton ; very clever story it is, too. So nothing comes amiss to *me*. Violante's escape, which has cost me the Count's ten thousand pounds, proves to be worth to me, I dare say, ten times as much. No doubt she'll have a hundred thousand pounds at the least. And then, if her father have no other child, after all, or the child he expects die in infancy, why, once reconciled to his government and restored to his estates, the law must take its usual course, and Violante will be the greatest heiress in Europe. As to the young lady herself, I confess she rather awes me ; I know I shall be henpecked. Well, all respectable husbands are. There is something scampish and ruffianly in not being henpecked." Here Randal's smile might have harmonised well with Pluto's "iron tears ;" but, iron as the smile was, the serious young man was ashamed of it. "What am I about," said he, half aloud, "chuckling to myself and wasting time, when I ought to be thinking gravely how to explain away my former cavalier courtship ? Such a masterpiece as I thought it then ! But who could foresee the turn things would take ? Let me think ; let me think. Plague on it, here she comes."

But Randal had not the fine ear of your more romantic lover ; and, to his great relief, the exile entered the room unaccompanied by Violante. Riccabocca looked somewhat embarrassed.

"My dear Leslie, you must excuse my daughter today ; she is still suffering from the agitation she has gone through, and cannot see you."

The lover tried not to look too delighted.

"Cruel," said he; "yet I would not for worlds force myself on her presence. I hope, duke, that she will not find it too difficult to obey the commands which dispose of her hand, and intrust her happiness to my grateful charge."

"To be plain with you, Randal, she does at present seem to find it more difficult than I foresaw. She even talks of——"

"Another attachment—Oh, heavens!"

"Attachment, *pazzie!* Whom has she seen? No—a convent! But leave it to me. In a calmer hour she will comprehend that a child must know no lot more enviable and holy than that of redeeming a father's honour. And now, if you are returning to London, may I ask you to convey to young Mr Hazeldean my assurances of undying gratitude for his share in my daughter's delivery from that poor baffled swindler."

It is noticeable that, now Peschiera was no longer an object of dread to the nervous father, he became but an object of pity to the philosopher, and of contempt to the grandee.

"True," said Randal, "you told me Frank had a share in Lord L'Estrange's very clever and dramatic device. My lord must be by nature a fine actor—comic, with a touch of melodrame! Poor Frank! apparently he has lost the woman he adored—Beatrice di Negra. You say she has accompanied the Count. Is the marriage that was to be between her and Frank broken off?"

"I did not know such a marriage was contemplated.

I understood her to be attached to another. Not that that is any reason why she should not have married Mr Hazeldean. Express to him my congratulations on his escape."

"Nay, he must not know that I have inadvertently betrayed his confidence; but you now guess, what perhaps puzzled you before—viz., how I came to be so well acquainted with the Count and his movements. I was so intimate with my relation Frank, and Frank was affianced to the Marchesa."

"I am glad you give me that explanation; it suffices. After all, the Marchesa is not by nature a bad woman —that is, not worse than women generally are, so Harley says, and Violante forgives and excuses her."

"Generous Violante! But it is true. So much did the Marchesa appear to me possessed of fine, though ill-regulated qualities, that I always considered her disposed to aid in frustrating her brother's criminal designs. So I even said, if I remember right, to Violante."

Dropping this prudent and precautionary sentence, in order to guard against anything Violante might say as to that subtle mention of Beatrice which had predisposed her to confide in the Marchesa, Randal then hurried on,—"But you want repose. I leave you, the happiest, the most grateful of men. I will give your courteous message to Frank."

CHAPTER XII.

Curious to learn what had passed between Beatrice and Frank, and deeply interested in all that could oust Frank out of the Squire's good-will, or aught that could injure his own prospects, by tending to unite son and father, Randal was not slow in reaching his young kinsman's lodgings. It might be supposed that having, in all probability, just secured so great a fortune as would accompany Violante's hand, Randal might be indifferent to the success of his scheme on the Hazeldean exchequer. Such a supposition would grievously wrong this profound young man. For, in the first place, Violante was not yet won, nor her father yet restored to the estates which would defray her dower; and, in the next place, Randal, like Iago, loved villany for the genius it called forth in him. The sole luxury the abstemious aspirer allowed to himself was that which is found in intellectual restlessness. Untempted by wine, dead to love, unamused by pleasure, indifferent to the arts, despising literature, save as means to some end of power, Randal Leslie was the incarnation of thought, hatched out of the corruption of will. At twilight we see thin airy spectral insects, all wing and

nippers, hovering, as if they could never pause, over some sullen mephitic pool. Just so, methinks, hover over Acheron such gnat-like, noiseless soarers into gloomy air out of Stygian deeps, as are the thoughts of spirits like Randal Leslie's. Wings have they, but only the better to pounce down—draw their nutriment from unguarded material cuticles; and just when, maddened, you strike, and exulting exclaim, "Caught by Jove!" wh—irr flies the diaphanous ghostly larva, and your blow falls on your own twice-offended cheek.

The young men who were acquainted with Randal said he had not a vice! The fact being, that his whole composition was one epic vice, so elaborately constructed that it had not an episode which a critic could call irrelevant. Grand young man!

"But, my dear fellow," said Randal, as soon as he had learned from Frank all that had passed on board the vessel between him and Beatrice, "I cannot believe this. 'Never loved you!' What was her object, then, in deceiving, not only you, but myself? I suspect her declaration was but some heroical refinement of generosity. After her brother's dejection and probable ruin, she might feel that she was no match for you. Then, too, the Squire's displeasure. I see it all—just like her—noble, unhappy woman!"

Frank shook his head. "There are moments," said he, with a wisdom that comes out of those instincts which awake from the depths of youth's first great sorrow—"moments when a woman cannot feign, and

there are tones in the voice of a woman which men cannot misinterpret. She does not love me—she never did love me; I can see that her heart has been elsewhere. No matter—all is over. I don't deny that I am suffering an intense grief; it gnaws like a kind of sullen hunger; and I feel so broken, too, as if I had grown old, and there was nothing left worth living for. I don't deny all that."

"My poor dear friend, if you would but believe——"

"I don't want to believe anything, except that I have been a great fool. I don't think I can ever commit such follies again. But I'm a man. I shall get the better of this; I should despise myself if I could not. And now let us talk of my dear father. Has he left town?"

"Left last night, by the mail. You can write and tell him you have given up the Marchesa, and all will be well again between you."

"Give her up! Fie, Randal! Do you think I should tell such a lie?—She gave me up; I can claim no merit out of that."

"Oh yes! I can make the Squire see all to your advantage. Oh, if it were only the Marchesa! but, alas! that cursed *post-obit!* How could Levy betray you? Never trust to usurers again; they cannot resist the temptation of a speedy profit. They first buy the son, and then sell him to the father. And the Squire has such strange notions on matters of this kind."

"He is right to have them. There, just read this letter from my mother. It came to me this morning.

I could hang myself, if I were a dog; but I'm a man, and so I must bear it."

Randal took Mrs Hazeldean's letter from Frank's trembling hand.—The poor mother had learned, though but imperfectly, Frank's misdeeds from some hurried lines which the Squire had despatched to her; and she wrote, as good, indulgent, but sensible, right-minded mothers alone can write. More lenient to an imprudent love than the Squire, she touched with discreet tenderness on Frank's rash engagements with a foreigner, but severely on his own open defiance of his father's wishes. Her anger was, however, reserved for that unholy *post-obit*. Here the hearty, genial wife's love overcame the mother's affection. To count, in cold blood, on that husband's death, and to wound his heart so keenly, just where its jealous fatherly fondness made it most susceptible!

"O Frank, Frank!" wrote Mrs Hazeldean, "were it not for this, were it only for your unfortunate attachment to the Italian lady, only for your debts, only for the errors of hasty, extravagant youth, I should be with you now—my arms round your neck, kissing you, chiding you back to your father's heart. But—but the thought that between you and his heart has been the sordid calculation of his death—*that* is a wall between us. I cannot come near you. I should not like to look on your face, and think how my William's tears fell over it, when I placed you, new born, in his arms, and bade him welcome his heir. What! you a mere boy

still, your father yet in the prime of life, and the heir cannot wait till nature leaves him fatherless. Frank, Frank! this is so unlike you. Can London have ruined already a disposition so honest and affectionate?—No; I cannot believe it. There must be some mistake. Clear it up, I implore you; or, though as a mother I pity you, as a wife I cannot forgive.

"HARRIET HAZELDEAN."

Even Randal was affected by the letter; for, as we know, even Randal felt in his own person the strength of family ties. The poor Squire's choler and bluffness had disguised the parental heart from an eye that, however acute, had not been willing to search for it; and Randal, ever affected through his intellect, had despised the very weakness on which he had preyed. But the mother's letter, so just and sensible (allowing that the Squire's opinions had naturally influenced the wife to take, what men of the world would call a very exaggerated view of the everyday occurrence of loans raised by a son, payable only at a father's death),—this letter, I say, if exaggerated according to fashionable notions, so sensible if judged by natural affections, touched the dull heart of the schemer, because approved by the quick tact of his intelligence.

"Frank," said he, with a sincerity that afterwards amazed himself, "go down at once to Hazeldean—see your mother, and explain to her how this transaction really happened. The woman you loved, and wooed as wife, in danger of an arrest—your distraction of

mind, Levy's counsels—your hope to pay off the debt, so incurred to the usurer, from the fortune you would shortly receive with the Marchesa. Speak to your mother—she is a woman; women have a common interest in forgiving all faults that arise from the source of their power over us men;—I mean love. Go!"

"No—I cannot go;—you see she would not like to look on my face. And I cannot repeat what you say so glibly. Besides, somehow or other, as I am so dependent upon my father,—and he has said as much,—I feel as if it would be mean in me to make any excuses. I did the thing, and must suffer for it. But I'm a m—an,—no—I'm not a man here." Frank burst into tears.

At the sight of those tears, Randal gradually recovered from his strange aberration into vulgar and low humanity. His habitual contempt for his kinsman returned; and with contempt came the natural indifference to the sufferings of the thing to be put to use. It is contempt for the worm that makes the angler fix it on the hook, and observe with complacency that the vivacity of its wriggles will attract the bite. If the worm could but make the angler respect, or even fear it, the barb would find some other bait. Few anglers would impale an estimable silkworm, and still fewer the anglers who would finger into service a formidable hornet.

"Pooh, my dear Frank," said Randal; "I have given you my advice; you reject it. Well, what then will you do?"

"I shall ask for leave of absence, and run away somewhere," said Frank, drying his tears. "I can't face London; I can't mix with others. I want to be by myself, and wrestle with all that I feel *here*—in my heart. Then I shall write to my mother, say the plain truth, and leave her to judge as kindly of me as she can."

"You are quite right. Yes, leave town! Why not go abroad? You have never been abroad. New scenes will distract your mind. Run over to Paris."

"Not to Paris—I don't want gaieties; but I did intend to go abroad somewhere—any dull dismal hole of a place. Good-by. Don't think of me any more for the present."

"But let me know where you go! and meanwhile I will see the Squire."

"Say as little of me as you can to him. I know you mean most kindly—but oh, how I wish there never had been any third person between me and my father! There: you may well snatch away your hand. What an ungrateful wretch to you I am. I do believe I am the wickedest fellow. What, you shake hands with me still. My dear Randal, you have the best heart—God bless you." Frank turned away, and disappeared within his dressing-room.

"They must be reconciled now, sooner or later—Squire and son,"—said Randal to himself, as he left the lodgings. "I don't see how I can prevent that—the Marchesa being withdrawn—unless Frank does it for me. But it is well he should be abroad—something

may be made out of that: meanwhile I may yet do all that I could reasonably hope to do—even if Frank had married Beatrice—since he was not to be disinherited. Get the Squire to advance the money for the Thornhill purchase—complete the affair;—this marriage with Violante will help;—Levy must know that; secure the borough;—well thought of. I will go to Avenel's. By the by—by the by—the Squire might as well keep me still in the entail after Frank—supposing Frank die childless. This love affair may keep him long from marrying. His hand was very hot—a hectic colour;—those strong-looking fellows often go off in a rapid decline, especially if anything preys on their minds—their minds are so very small."

"Ah—the Hazeldean Parson—and with Avenel! That young man, too—who is he? I have seen him before somewhere. My dear Mr Dale, this is a pleasant surprise. I thought you had returned to Hazeldean with our friend the Squire?"

MR DALE.—"The Squire! Has he left town, and without telling me?"

RANDAL (taking aside the Parson).—"He was anxious to get back to Mrs Hazeldean, who was naturally very uneasy about her son and this foolish marriage; but I am happy to tell you that that marriage is effectually and permanently broken off.

MR DALE.—"How, how? My poor friend told me he had wholly failed to make any impression on Frank—forbade me to mention the subject. I was just going to see Frank myself. I always had some influence with

him. But, Mr Leslie, explain this very sudden and happy event—the marriage broken off!"

RANDAL.—"It is a long story, and I dare not tell you my humble share in it. Nay, I must keep that secret. Frank might not forgive me. Suffice it that you have my word that the fair Italian has left England, and decidedly refused Frank's addresses. But stay—take my advice—don't go to him;—you see it was not only the marriage that has offended the Squire, but some pecuniary transactions—an unfortunate *post-obit* bond on the Casino property. Frank ought to be left to his own repentant reflections. They will be most salutary—you know his temper—he don't bear reproof; and yet it is better, on the other hand, not to let him treat too lightly what has passed. Let us leave him to himself for a few days. He is in an excellent frame of mind."

MR DALE (shaking Randal's hand warmly).—"You speak admirably—a *post-obit!*—so often as he has heard his father's opinion on such transactions. No—I will not see him—I should be too angry——"

RANDAL (leading the Parson back, resumes, after an exchange of salutations with Avenel, who, meanwhile, had been conferring with his nephew).—"You should not be so long away from your rectory, Mr Dale. Waht will your parish do without you?"

MR DALE.—"The old fable of the wheel and the fly. I am afraid the wheel rolls on the same. But if I am absent from my parish, I am still in the company of one who does me honour as an old parishioner. You

remember Leonard Fairfield, your antagonist in the Battle of the Stocks?"

MR AVENEL.—"My nephew, I am proud to say, sir."

Randal bowed with marked civility—Leonard with a reserve no less marked.

MR AVENEL (ascribing his nephew's reserve to shyness).—"You should be friends, you two youngsters. Who knows but you may run together in the same harness? Ah, that reminds me, Leslie—I have a word or two to say to you. Your servant, Mr Dale. Shall be happy to present you to Mrs Avenel. My card—Eaton Square—Number ——. You will call on me to-morrow, Leonard. And mind, I shall be very angry if you persist in your refusal. Such an opening! (Avenel took Randal's arm, while the Parson and Leonard walked on.)

"Any fresh hints as to Lansmere?" asked Randal.

"Yes; I have now decided on the plan of contest. We must fight two and two—you and Egerton against me and (if I can get him to stand, as I hope) my nephew, Leonard."

"What!" said Randal, alarmed; "then, after all, I can hope for no support from you?"

"I don't say that; but I have reason to think Lord L'Estrange will bestir himself actively in favour of Egerton. If so, it will be a very sharp contest; and I must manage the whole election on our side, and unite all our shaky votes, which I can best do by standing myself in the first instance, reserving it to after-consideration whether I shall throw up at the last; for I

don't particularly want to come in, as I did a little time ago, before I had found out my nephew. Wonderful young man!—with such a head—will do me credit in the rotten old House; and I think I had best leave London, go to Screwstown, and look to my business. No: if Leonard stand, I must first see to get him in; and next, to keep Egerton out. It will probably, therefore, end in the return of one and one on either side, as we thought of before. Leonard on our side; and Egerton shan't be the man on the other. You understand?"

"I do, my dear Avenel. Of course, as I before said, I can't dictate to your party whom they should prefer —Egerton or myself. And it will be obvious to the public that your party would rather defeat so eminent an adversary as Mr Egerton, than a tyro in politics like me. Of course I cannot scheme for such a result; it would be misconstrued, and damage my character. But I rely equally on your friendly promise."

"Promise! No—I don't promise; I must first see how the cat jumps; and I don't know yet how our friends may like you, nor how they can be managed. All I can say is, that Audley Egerton shan't be M.P. for Lansmere. Meanwhile, you will take care not to commit yourself in speaking, so that our party can't vote for you consistently: they must count on having you—when you get into the House."

"I am not a violent party-man at present," answered Randal, prudently; "and if public opinion prove on your side, it is the duty of a statesman to go with the times."

"Very sensibly said; and I have a private bill or two, and some other little jobs I want to get through the House, which we can discuss later, should it come to a frank understanding between us. We must arrange how to meet privately at Lansmere, if necessary. I'll see to that. I shall go down this week. I think of taking a hint from the free and glorious land of America, and establishing secret caucuses. Nothing like 'em."

"Caucuses?"

"Small sub-committees that spy on their men night and day, and don't suffer them to be intimidated to vote the other way."

"You have an extraordinary head for public affairs, Avenel. You *should* come into Parliament yourself; your nephew is so very young."

"So are you."

"Yes; but I know the world. Does he?"

"The world knows him, though not by name, and he has been the making of me."

"How? You surprise me."

Avenel first explained about the patent which Leonard had secured to him; and next confided, upon honour, Leonard's identity with the anonymous author whom the Parson had supposed to be Professor Moss.

Randal Leslie felt a jealous pang. What! then—had this village boy—this associate of John Burley (literary vagabond, whom he supposed had long since gone to the dogs, and been buried at the expense of the parish)—had this boy so triumphed over birth, rearing, circumstance, that if Randal and Leonard had met

together in any public place, and Leonard's identity with the rising author been revealed, every eye would have turned from Randal to gaze on Leonard? The common consent of mankind would have acknowledged the supreme royalty of genius when it once leaves its solitude, and strides into the world. What! was this rude villager the child of Fame, who, without an effort, and unconsciously, had inspired in the wearied heart of Beatrice di Negra a love that Randal knew, by an instinct, no arts, no craft, could ever create for him in the heart of woman? And, now, did this same youth stand on the same level in the ascent to power as he, the well-born Randal Leslie, the accomplished *protégé* of the superb Audley Egerton? Were they to be rivals in the same arena of practical busy life? Randal gnawed his quivering lip.

All the while, however, the young man whom he so envied was a prey to sorrows deeper far than could ever find room or footing in the narrow and stony heart of the unloving schemer. As Leonard walked through the crowded streets with the friend and monitor of his childhood, confiding the simple tale of his earlier trials —when, amidst the wreck of fortune, and in despair of fame, the Child-angel smiled by his side, like Hope— all renown seemed to him so barren, all the future so dark! His voice trembled, and his countenance became so sad, that his benignant listener, divining that around the image of Helen there clung some passionate grief that overshadowed all worldly success, drew Leonard gently and gently on, till the young man, long yearning

for some confidant, told him all;—how, faithful through long years to one pure and ardent memory, Helen had been seen once more—the child ripened to woman, and the memory revealing itself as love.

The Parson listened with a mild and thoughtful brow, which expanded into a more cheerful expression as Leonard closed his story.

"I see no reason to despond," said Mr Dale. "You fear that Miss Digby does not return your attachment; you dwell upon her reserve—her distant though kindly manner. Cheer up! All young ladies are under the influence of what phrenologists call the organ of Secretiveness, when they are in the society of the object of their preference. Just as you describe Miss Digby's manner to you, was my Carry's manner to myself."

The Parson here indulged in a very appropriate digression upon female modesty, which he wound up by asserting, that that estimable virtue became more and more influenced by the secretive organ, in proportion as the favoured suitor approached near and nearer to a definite proposal. It was the duty of a gallant and honourable lover to make that proposal in distinct and orthodox form, before it could be expected that a young lady should commit herself and the dignity of her sex by the slightest hint as to her own inclinations.

"Next," continued the Parson, "you choose to torment yourself by contrasting your own origin and fortunes with the altered circumstances of Miss Digby—the ward of Lord L'Estrange, the guest of Lady Lans-

mere. You say that if Lord L'Estrange could have countenanced such a union, he would have adopted a different tone with you—sounded your heart, encouraged your hopes, and so forth. I view things differently. I have reason to do so; and, from all you have told me of this nobleman's interest in your fate, I venture to make you this promise, that if Miss Digby would accept your hand, Lord L'Estrange shall ratify her choice."

"My dear Mr Dale," cried Leonard, transported, "you make me that promise?"

"I do—from what you have said, and from what I myself know of Lord L'Estrange. Go, then, at once to Knightsbridge—see Miss Digby, show her your heart—explain to her, if you will, your prospects—ask her permission to apply to Lord L'Estrange (since he has constituted himself her guardian); and if Lord L'Estrange hesitate—which, if your happiness be set on this union, I think he will not—let me know, and leave the rest to me."

Leonard yielded himself to the Parson's persuasive eloquence. Indeed, when he recalled to mind those passages in the manuscripts of the ill-fated Nora which referred to the love that Harley had once borne to her (for he felt convinced that Harley and the boy suitor of Nora's narrative were one and the same); and when all the interest that Harley had taken in his own fortunes was explained by his relationship to her (even when Lord L'Estrange had supposed it less close than he would now discover it to be), the young man, rea-

soning by his own heart, could not but suppose that the noble Harley would rejoice to confer happiness upon the son of her, so beloved by his boyhood.

"And to thee, perhaps, O my mother!" thought Leonard, with swimming eyes—"to thee, perhaps, even in thy grave, I shall owe the partner of my life, as to the mystic breath of thy genius I owe the first pure aspirations of my soul."

It will be seen that Leonard had not confided to the Parson his discovery of Nora's manuscripts, nor even his knowledge of his real birth; for the proud son naturally shrank from any confidence that implicated Nora's fair name, until at least Harley, who, it was clear from those papers, must have intimately known his father, should perhaps decide the question which the papers themselves left so terribly vague—viz., whether he were the offspring of a legal marriage, or Nora had been the victim of some unholy fraud.

While the Parson still talked, and while Leonard still mused and listened, their steps almost mechanically took the direction towards Knightsbridge, and paused at the gates of Lord Lansmere's house.

"Go in, my young friend; I will wait without to know the issue," said the Parson, cheeringly. "Go; and with gratitude to Heaven, learn how to bear the most precious joy that can befall mortal man; or how to submit to youth's sharpest sorrow, with the humble belief that even sorrow is but some mercy concealed."

CHAPTER XIII.

LEONARD was shown into the drawing-room, and it so chanced that Helen was there alone. The girl's soft face was sadly changed even since Leonard had seen it last; for the grief of natures mild and undemonstrative as hers, gnaws with quick ravages; but at Leonard's unexpected entrance, the colour rushed so vividly to the pale cheeks, that its hectic might be taken for the lustre of bloom and health. She rose hurriedly, and in great confusion faltered out, "that she believed Lady Lansmere was in her room—she would go for her," and moved towards the door, without seeming to notice the hand tremulously held forth to her; when Leonard exclaimed in uncontrollable emotions which pierced to her very heart, in the keen accent of reproach—

"Oh, Miss Digby—oh, Helen—is it thus that you greet me—rather thus that you shun me? Could I have foreseen this when we two orphans stood by the mournful bridge; so friendless—so desolate—and so clinging each to each! Happy time!" He seized her hand suddenly as he spoke the last words, and bowed his face over it.

"I must not hear you. Do not talk so, Leonard—you break my heart. Let me go—let me go."

"Is it that I am grown hateful to you; is it merely that you see my love and would discourage it? Helen, speak to me—speak!"

He drew her with tender force towards him; and, holding her firmly by both hands, sought to gaze upon the face that she turned from him—turned in such despair.

"You do not know," she said at last, struggling for composure—"you do not know the new claims on me—my altered position—how I am bound, or you would be the last to speak thus to me, the first to give me courage—and bid me—bid me——"

"Bid you what?"

"Feel nothing here but duty!" cried Helen, drawing from his clasp both her hands, and placing them firmly on her breast.

"Miss Digby," said Leonard, after a short pause of bitter reflection, in which he wronged, while he thought to divine her meaning, "you speak of new claims on you, your altered position—I comprehend. You may retain some tender remembrance of the past; but your duty now is to rebuke my presumption. It is as I thought and feared. This vain reputation which I have made is but a hollow sound—it gives me no rank, assures me no fortune. I have no right to look for the Helen of old in the Helen of to-day. Be it so—forget what I have said, and forgive me."

This reproach stung to the quick the heart to which it appealed. A flash brightened the meek tearful eyes,

almost like the flash of resentment—her lips writhed in torture, and she felt as if all other pain were light compared with the anguish that Leonard could impute to her motives which to her simple nature seemed so unworthy of her, and so galling to himself.

A word rushed as by inspiration to her lip, and that word calmed and soothed her.

"Brother!" she said, touchingly, "brother!"

The word had a contrary effect on Leonard. Sweet as it was, tender as the voice that spoke it, it imposed a boundary to affection—it came as a knell to hope. He recoiled, shook his head mournfully—"Too late to accept that tie—too late even for friendship. Henceforth—for long years to come—henceforth, till this heart has ceased to beat at your name—to thrill at your presence, we two—are strangers."

"Strangers! Well—yes, it is right—it must be so; we must not meet. Oh, Leonard Fairfield, who was it that in those days that you recall to me—who was it that found you destitute and obscure—who, not degrading you by charity, placed you in your right career—opened to you, amidst the labyrinth in which you were well-nigh lost, the broad road to knowledge, independence, fame? Answer me—answer! Was it not the same who reared—sheltered your sister orphan? If I could forget what I have owed to him, should I not remember what he has done for you? Can I hear of your distinction and not remember it? Can I think how proud she may be who will one day lean on your arm, and bear the name you have already raised beyond

all the titles of an hour? Can I think of this, and not remember our common friend, benefactor, guardian? Would you forgive me, if I failed to do so?"

"But," faltered Leonard, fear mingling with the conjectures these words called forth—"but is it that Lord L'Estrange would not consent to our union?—or of what do you speak? You bewilder me."

Helen felt for some moments as if it were impossible to reply; and the words at length were dragged forth as if from the depth of her very soul.

"He came to me—our noble friend. I never dreamed of it. He did not tell me that he loved me. He told me that he was unhappy, alone; that in me, and only in me, he could find a comforter, a soother—He, he! —And I had just arrived in England—was under his mother's roof—had not then once more seen you; and—and—what could I answer? Strengthen me—strengthen me, you whom I look up to and revere. Yes, yes—you are right. We must see each other no more. I am betrothed to another—to him! Strengthen me!"

All the inherent nobleness of the poet's nature rose at once at this appeal.

"Oh, Helen—sister—Miss Digby, forgive me. You need no strength from me; I borrow it from you. I comprehend you—I respect. Banish all thought of me. Repay our common benefactor. Be what he asks of you—his comforter, his soother; be more—his pride and his joy. Happiness will come to you, as it comes to those who confer happiness and forget self. God comfort you in the passing struggle; God bless you, in

the long years to come. Sister—I accept the holy name now, and will claim it hereafter, when I too can think more of others than myself."

Helen had covered her face with her hands, sobbing; but with that soft womanly constraint which presses woe back into the heart. A strange sense of utter solitude suddenly pervaded her whole being, and by that sense of solitude she knew that he was gone.

CHAPTER XIV.

In another room in that same house sat, solitary as Helen, a stern, gloomy, brooding man, in whom they who had best known him from his childhood could scarcely have recognised a trace of the humane, benignant, trustful, but wayward and varying Harley, Lord L'Estrange.

He had read that fragment of a memoir, in which, out of all the chasms of his barren and melancholy past, there rose two malignant truths that seemed literally to glare upon him with mocking and demon eyes: the woman whose remembrance had darkened all the sunshine of his life, had loved another; the friend in whom he had confided his whole affectionate loyal soul had been his perfidious rival. He had read from the first word to the last, as if under a spell that held him breathless; and when he closed the manuscript, it was without groan or sigh; but over his pale lips there passed that withering smile, which is as sure an index of a heart overcharged with dire and fearful passions, as the arrowy flash of the lightning is of the tempests that are gathered within the cloud.

He then thrust the papers into his bosom, and, keep-

ing his hand over them, firmly clenched, he left the room, and walked slowly on towards his father's house. With every step by the way, his nature, in the war of its elements, seemed to change and harden into forms of granite. Love, humanity, trust, vanished away. Hate, revenge, misanthropy, suspicion, and scorn of all that could wear the eyes of affection, or speak with the voice of honour, came fast through the gloom of his thoughts, settling down in the wilderness, grim and menacing as the harpies of ancient song—

"——Uncæque manus, et pallida semper Ora." *

Thus the gloomy man had crossed the threshold of his father's house, and silently entered the apartments still set apart for him. He had arrived about an hour before Leonard; and as he stood by the hearth, with his arms folded on his breast, and his eyes fixed lead-like on the ground, his mother came in to welcome and embrace him. He checked her eager inquiries after Violante—he recoiled from the touch of her hand.

"Hold, madam," said he, startling her ear with the cold austerity of his tone. "I cannot heed your questions—I am filled with the question I must put to yourself. You opposed my boyish love for Leonora Avenel. I do not blame you—all mothers of equal rank would have done the same. Yet, had you not frustrated all frank intercourse with her, I might have taken refusal from her own lips—survived that grief, and now been a happy man. Years since then have

* "Hands armed with fangs, and lips for ever pale."

rolled away—rolled over her quiet slumbers, and my restless waking life. All this time were you aware that Audley Egerton had been the lover of Leonora Avenel?"

"Harley, Harley!—do not speak to me in that cruel voice—do not look at me with those hard eyes!"

"You knew it, then—you, my mother!" continued Harley, unmoved by her rebuke; "and why did you never say, 'Son, you are wasting the bloom and uses of your life in sorrowful fidelity to a lie! You are lavishing trust and friendship on a perfidious hypocrite?'"

"How could I speak to you thus—how could I dare to do so—seeing you still so cherished the memory of that unhappy girl—still believed that she had returned your affection? Had I said to you what I knew (but not till after her death), as to her relations with Audley Egerton——"

"Well?—you falter—go on—had you done so?"

"Would you have felt no desire for revenge? Might there not have been strife between you—danger—bloodshed? Harley, Harley! Is not such silence pardonable in a mother? And why deprive you too of the only friend you seemed to prize—who alone had some influence over you—who concurred with me in the prayer and hope, that some day you would find a living partner worthy to replace this lost delusion, arouse your faculties—be the ornament your youth promised to your country? For you wrong Audley—indeed you do!"

"Wrong him! Ah! let me not do that. Proceed."

"I do not excuse him his rivalship, nor his first con-

cealment of it. But believe me, since then, his genuine remorse, his anxious tenderness for your welfare, his dread of losing your friendship——"

"Stop—it was doubtless Audley Egerton who induced you yourself to conceal what you call his 'relations' with her whom I can now so calmly name—Leonora Avenel?"

"It was so, in truth—and from motives that——"

"Enough—let me hear no more."

"But you will not think too sternly of what is passed; you are about to form new ties. You cannot be wild and wicked enough to meditate what your brow seems to threaten. You cannot dream of revenge—risk Audley's life or your own?"

"Tut—tut—tut! What cause here for duels? Single combats are out of date—civilised men do not slay each other with sword and pistol. Tut!—revenge! Does it look like revenge, that one object which brings me hither is to request my father's permission to charge myself with the care of Audley Egerton's election? What he values most in the world is his political position; and here his political existence is at stake. You know that I have had through life the character of a weak, easy, somewhat over-generous man. Such men are not revengful. Hold! You lay your hand on my arm—I know the magic of that light touch, mother; but its power over me is gone. Countess of Lansmere, hear me! Ever from infancy (save in that frantic passion for which I now despise myself), I have obeyed you, I trust, as a duteous son. Now, our relative positions are

somewhat altered. I have the right to exact—I will not say to command—the right which wrong and injury bestow upon all men. Madam, the injured man has prerogatives that rival those of kings. I now call upon you to question me no more—not again to breathe the name of Leonora Avenel, unless I invite the subject; and not to inform Audley Egerton by a hint—by a breath—that I have discovered—what shall I call it? his 'pardonable deceit.' Promise me this, by your affection as mother, and on your faith as gentlewoman—or I declare solemnly, that never in life will you look upon my face again."

Haughty and imperious though the Countess was, her spirit quailed before Harley's brow and voice.

"Is this my son—this my gentle Harley?" she said, falteringly. "Oh! put your arms round my neck—let me feel that I have not lost my child!"

Harley look softened, but he did not obey the pathetic prayer; nevertheless, he held out his hand, and turning away his face, said, in a milder voice, "Have I your promise?"

"You have—you have; but on condition that there pass no words between you and Audley that can end but in the strife which——"

"Strife!" interrupted Harley. "I repeat that the idea of challenge and duel between me and my friend from our school-days, and on a quarrel that we could explain to no seconds, would be a burlesque upon all that is grave in the realities of life and feeling. I accept your promise and seal it thus——"

He pressed his lips to his mother's forehead, and passively received her embrace.

"Hush," he said, withdrawing from her arms, "I hear my father's voice."

Lord Lansmere threw open the door widely, and with a certain consciousness that the door by which an Earl of Lansmere entered ought to be thrown open widely. It could not have been opened with more majesty if a *huissier*, or officer of the Household, had stood on either side. The Countess passed by her lord with a light step, and escaped.

"I was occupied with my architect in designs for the new infirmary, of which I shall make a present to our county. I have only just heard that you were here, Harley. What is all this about our fair Italian guest? Is she not coming back to us? Your mother refers me to you for explanations."

"You shall have them later, my dear father; at present I can think only of public affairs."

"Public affairs!—they are indeed alarming. I am rejoiced to hear you express yourself so worthily. An awful crisis, Harley! And, gracious Heaven! I have heard that a low man, who was born in Lansmere, but made a fortune in America, is about to contest the borough. They tell me he is one of the Avenels—a born Blue—is it possible?"

"I have come here on that business. As a peer, you cannot, of course, interfere. But I propose, with your leave, to go down myself to Lansmere, and undertake the superintendence of the election. It would be

better, perhaps, if you were not present; it would give us more liberty of action."

"My dear Harley, shake hands; anything you please. You know how I have wished to see you come forward, and take that part in life which becomes your birth."

"Ah, you think I have sadly wasted my existence hitherto."

"To be frank with you, yes, Harley," said the Earl, with a pride that was noble in its nature, and not without dignity in its expression. "The more we take from our country, the more we owe to her. From the moment you came into the world, as the inheritor of lands and honours, you were charged with a trust for the benefit of others, that it degrades one of our order of gentlemen not to discharge."

Harley listened with a sombre brow, and made no direct reply.

"Indeed," resumed the Earl, "I would rather you were about to canvass for yourself than for your friend Egerton. But I grant he is an example that it is never too late to follow. Why, who that had seen you both as youths, notwithstanding Audley had the advantage of being some years your senior—who could have thought that he was the one to become distinguished and eminent—and you to degenerate into the luxurious idler, averse to all trouble and careless of all fame? You, with such advantages, not only of higher fortunes, but, as every one said, of superior talents—you, who had then so much ambition—so keen a desire

for glory, sleeping with Plutarch's Lives under your pillow, and only, my wild son, only too much energy. But you are a young man still—it is not too late to redeem the years you have thrown away."

"The years—are nothing—mere dates in an almanack; but the feelings, what can give me back those? —the hope, the enthusiasm, the—no matter! feelings do not help men to rise in the world. Egerton's feelings are not too lively. What I might have been, leave it to me to remember—let us talk of the example you set before me—of Audley Egerton."

"We must get him in," said the Earl, sinking his voice into a whisper. "It is of more importance to him than I even thought for. But you know his secrets. Why did you not confide to me frankly the state of his affairs?"

"His affairs! Do you mean that they are seriously embarrassed? This interests me much. Pray speak; what do you know?"

"He has discharged the greater part of his establishment. That in itself is natural on quitting office; but still it set people talking; and it has got wind that his estates are not only mortgaged for more than they are worth, but that he has been living upon the discount of bills; in short, he has been too intimate with a man whom we all know by sight—a man who drives the finest horses in London, and they tell me (but *that* I cannot believe) lives in the familiar society of the young puppies he snares to perdition. What's the man's name? Levy, is it not?—yes, Levy."

"I have seen Levy with him," said Harley; and a sinister joy lighted up his falcon eyes. "Levy—Levy—it is well."

"I hear but the gossip of the clubs," resumed the Earl. "But they do say that Levy makes little disguise of his power over our very distinguished friend, and rather parades it as a merit with our party (and, indeed, with all men—for Egerton has personal friends in every party), that he keeps sundry bills locked up in his desk until Egerton is once more safe in Parliament. Nevertheless if, after all, our friend were to lose his election, and Levy were then to seize on his effects, and proclaim his ruin—it would seriously damage, perhaps altogether destroy, Audley's political career."

"So I conclude," said Harley. "A Charles Fox might be a gamester, and a William Pitt be a pauper. But Audley Egerton is not of their giant stature;—he stands so high because he stands upon heaps of respectable gold. Audley Egerton, needy and impoverished—out of Parliament, and, as the vulgar slang has it, out at elbows, skulking from duns, perhaps in the Bench——"

"No, no—our party would never allow that; we would subscribe——"

"Worse than all, living as the pensioner of the party he aspired to lead! You say truly. His political prospects would be blasted. A man whose reputation lay in his outward respectability! Why, people would say that Audley Egerton has been—a solemn lie; eh, my father?"

"How can you talk with such coolness of your

friend? You need say nothing to interest me in his election—if you mean that. Once in Parliament, he must soon again be in office—and learn to live on his salary. You must get him to submit to me the schedule of his liabilities. I have a head for business, as you know. I will arrange his affairs for him. And I will yet bet five to one, though I hate wagers, that he will be prime minister in three years. He is not brilliant, it is true; but just at this crisis we want a safe, moderate, judicious, conciliatory man; and Audley has so much tact, such experience of the House, such knowledge of the world, and," added the Earl, emphatically summing up his eulogies, "he is so thorough a gentleman!"

"A thorough gentleman, as you say—the soul of honour! But, my dear father, it is your hour for riding; let me not detain you. It is settled, then; you do not come yourself to Lansmere. You put the house at my disposal, and allow me to invite Egerton, of course, and what other guests I may please; in short, you leave all to me?"

"Certainly; and if *you* cannot get in your friend, who can? That borough, it is an awkward, ungrateful place, and has been the plague of my life. So much as I have spent there, too,—so much as I have done to its trade." And the Earl, with an indignant sigh, left the room.

Harley seated himself deliberately at his writing table, leaning his face on his hand, and looking abstractedly into space from under-knit and lowering brows.

Harley L'Estrange was, as we have seen, a man singularly tenacious of affections and impressions. He was a man, too, whose nature was eminently bold, loyal, and candid; even the apparent whim and levity which misled the world, both as to his dispositions and his powers, might be half ascribed to that open temper, which, in its over-contempt for all that seemed to savour of hypocrisy, sported with forms and ceremonials, and extracted humour, sometimes extravagant, sometimes profound—from "the solemn plausibilities of the world." The shock he had now received smote the very foundations of his mind, and, overthrowing all the airier structures which fancy and wit had built upon its surface, left it clear as a new world for the operations of the darker and more fearful passions. When a man of a heart so loving, and a nature so irregularly powerful as Harley's suddenly and abruptly discovers deceit where he had most confided, it is not (as with the calmer pupils of that harsh teacher Experience) the mere withdrawal of esteem and affection from the one offender,—it is, that trust in everything seems gone,—it is, that the injured spirit looks back to the Past, and condemns all its kindlier virtues as follies that conduced to its own woe; and looks on to the Future as to a journey beset with smiling traitors, whom it must meet with an equal simulation, or crush with a superior force. The guilt of treason to men like these is incalculable,—it robs the world of all the benefits they would otherwise have lavished as they passed,—it is responsible for all the ill that springs from the corruption of natures, whose

very luxuriance, when the atmosphere is once tainted, does but diffuse disease; even as the malaria settles not over thin and barren soils, nor over wastes that have been from all time desolate, but over the places in which southern suns had once ripened delightful gardens, or the sites of cities, in which the pomp of palaces has passed away."

It was not enough that the friend of his youth, the confidant of his love, had betrayed his trust—been the secret and successful rival;—not enough that the woman his boyhood had madly idolised, and all the while he had sought her traces with pining remorseful heart,—believing she but eluded his suit from the emulation of a kindred generosity,—desiring rather to sacrifice her own love, than to cost to his the sacrifice of all which youth rashly scorns, and the world so highly estimates;—not enough that all this while her refuge had been the bosom of another. This was not enough of injury. His whole life had been wasted on a delusion—his faculties and aims,—the wholesome ambition of lofty minds had been arrested at the very onset of fair existence,—his heart corroded by a regret for which there was no cause,—his conscience charged with the terror that his wild chase had urged a too tender victim to the grave, over which he had mourned. What years that might otherwise have been to himself so serene, to the world so useful, had been consumed in objectless, barren, melancholy dreams! And all this while to whom had his complaints been uttered?—to the man who knew that his remorse was an idle spectre,

and his faithful sorrow a mocking self-deceit. Every thought that could gall man's natural pride,—every remembrance that could sting into revenge a heart that had loved too deeply not to be accessible to hate, conspired to goad those maddening Furies who come into every temple which is once desecrated by the presence of the evil passions. In that sullen silence of the soul, vengeance took the form of justice. Changed though his feelings towards Leonora Avenel were, the story of her grief and her wrongs embittered still more his wrath against his rival. The fragments of her memoir left naturally on Harley's mind the conviction that she had been the victim of an infamous fraud—the dupe of a false marriage. His idol had not only been stolen from the altar, it had been sullied by the sacrifice,—broken with remorseless hand, and thrust into dishonoured clay,—mutilated,—defamed,—its very memory a thing of contempt to him who had ravished it from worship. The living Harley and the dead Nora—both called aloud to their joint despoiler, "Restore what thou hast taken from us, or pay the forfeit!"

"Thus, then, during the interview between Helen and Leonard,—thus Harley L'Estrange sat alone! and as a rude irregular lump of steel, when wheeled round into rapid motion, assumes the form of the circle it describes, so his iron purpose, hurried on by his relentless passion, filled the space into which he gazed with optical delusions—scheme after scheme revolving and consummating the circles that clasped a foe.

CHAPTER XV.

THE entrance of a servant, announcing a name which Harley, in the absorption of his gloomy reverie, did not hear, was followed by that of a person on whom he lifted his eyes in the cold and haughty surprise with which a man, much occupied, greets and rebukes the intrusion of an unwelcome stranger.

"It is so long since your Lordship has seen me," said the visitor, with mild dignity, "that I cannot wonder you do not recognise my person, and have forgotten my name."

"Sir," answered Harley, with an impatient rudeness ill in harmony with the urbanity for which he was usually distinguished—"sir, your person is strange to me, and your name I did not hear; but, at all events, I am not now at leisure to attend to you. Excuse my plainness."

"Yet, pardon me if I still linger. My name is Dale. I was formerly curate at Lansmere; and I would speak to your lordship in the name and the memory of one once dear to you—Leonora Avenel."

HARLEY (after a short pause).—"Sir, I cannot conjecture your business. But be seated. I remember

you now, though years have altered both; and I have since heard much in your favour from Leonard Fairfield. Still, let me pray that you will be brief."

Mr Dale.—"May I assume at once that you have divined the parentage of the young man you call Fairfield? When I listened to his grateful praises of your beneficence, and marked with melancholy pleasure the reverence in which he holds you, my heart swelled within me. I acknowledged the mysterious force of nature."

Harley.—"Force of nature! You talk in riddles."

Mr Dale (indignantly).—"Oh, my lord, how can you so disguise your better self? Surely in Leonard Fairfield you have long since recognised the son of Nora Avenel?"

Harley passed his hand over his face. "Ah!" thought he, "she lived to bear a son, then—a son to Egerton! Leonard is that son. I should have known it by the likeness—by the fond foolish impulse that moved me to him. This is why he confided to me these fearful memoirs. He seeks his father—he shall find him."

Mr Dale (mistaking the cause of Harley's silence).—"I honour your compunction, my lord. Oh! let your heart and your conscience continue to speak to your worldly pride."

Harley.—"My compunction, heart, conscience! Mr Dale, you insult me!"

Mr Dale (sternly).—"Not so; I am fulfilling my mission, which bids me rebuke the sinner. Leonora

Avenel speaks in me, and commands the guilty father to acknowledge the innocent child!"

Harley half rose, and his eyes literally flashed fire; but he calmed his anger into irony. "Ha!" said he, with a sarcastic smile, "so you suppose that I was the perfidious seducer of Nora Avenel—that I am the callous father of the child who came into the world without a name. Very well, sir, taking these assumptions for granted, what is it you demand from me on behalf of this young man?"

"I ask from you his happiness," replied Mr Dale, imploringly; and yielding to the compassion with which Leonard inspired him, and persuaded that Lord L'Estrange felt a father's love for the boy whom he had saved from the whirlpool of London, and guided to safety and honourable independence, he here, with simple eloquence, narrated all Leonard's feelings for Helen—his silent fidelity to her image, though a child's—his love when he again beheld her as a woman—the modest fears which the Parson himself had combated—the recommendation that Mr Dale had forced upon him, to confess his affection to Helen, and plead his cause. "Anxious, as you may believe, for his success," continued the Parson, "I waited without your gates till he came from Miss Digby's presence. And oh, my lord, had you but seen his face!—such emotion and such despair! I could not learn from him what had passed. He escaped from me, and rushed away. All that I could gather was from a few broken words, and from those words I formed the conjecture (it may be

erroneous) that the obstacle to his happiness was not in Helen's heart, my lord, but seemed to me as if it were in yourself. Therefore, when he had vanished from my sight, I took courage, and came at once to you. If he be your son, and Helen Digby be your ward—she herself an orphan, dependent on your bounty—why should they be severed? Equals in years—united by early circumstance—congenial it seems, in simple habits and refined tastes—what should hinder their union, unless it be the want of fortune?—and all men know your wealth—none ever questioned your generosity. My lord, my lord, your look freezes me. If I have offended, do not visit my offence on him—on Leonard!"

"And so," said Harley, still controlling his rage, "so this boy—whom, as you say, I saved from that pitiless world which has engulfed many a nobler genius—so, in return for all, he has sought to rob me of the last affection, poor and lukewarm though it was, that remained to me in life. He presume to lift his eyes to my affianced bride! He! And, for aught I know, steal from me her living heart, and leave to me her icy hand!"

"Oh, my lord, your affianced bride! I never dreamed of this. I implore your pardon. The very thought is so terrible—so unnatural—the son to woo the father's——! Oh, what sin have I fallen into! The sin was mine—I urged and persuaded him to it. He was ignorant as myself. Forgive him, forgive him!"

"Mr Dale," said Harley, rising, and extending his

hand, which the poor Parson felt himself unworthy to take—"Mr Dale, you are a good man—if, indeed, this universe of liars contains some man who does not cheat our judgment when we deem him honest. Allow me only to ask why you consider Leonard Fairfield to be my son?"

"Was not your youthful admiration for poor Nora evident to me? Remember, I was a frequent guest at Lansmere Park; and it was so natural that you, with all your brilliant gifts, should captivate her refined fancy—her affectionate heart."

"Natural—you think so—go on."

"Your mother, as became her, separated you. It was not unknown to me that you still cherished a passion which your rank forbade to be lawful. Poor girl; she left the roof of her protectress, Lady Jane. Nothing was known of her till she came to her father's house, to give birth to a child, and die. And the same day that dawned on her corpse, you hurried from the place. Ah! no doubt your conscience smote you—you have never returned to Lansmere since."

Harley's breast heaved—he waved his hand—the Parson resumed—

"Whom could I suspect but you? I made inquiries: they confirmed my suspicions."

"Perhaps you inquired of my friend Mr Egerton? He was with me—when—when, as you say, I hurried from the place."

"I did, my lord."

"And he?"

"Denied your guilt; but still, a man of honour so nice, of heart so feeling, could not feign readily. His denial did not deceive me."

"Honest man!" said Harley; and his hand griped the breast over which still rustled, as if with a ghostly sigh, the records of the dead. "He knew she had left a son, too?"

"He did, my lord; of course, I told him that."

"The son whom I found starving in the streets of London! Mr Dale, as you see, your words move me very much. I cannot deny that he who wronged, it may be with no common treachery, that young mother —for Nora Avenel was not one to be lightly seduced into error——"

"Indeed, no!"

"And who then thought no more of the offspring of her anguish and his own crime—I cannot deny that that man deserves some chastisement—should render some atonement. Am I not right here? Answer with the plain speech which becomes your sacred calling."

"I cannot say otherwise, my lord," replied the Parson, pitying what appeared to him such remorse. "But if he repent——"

"Enough," interrupted Harley, "I now invite you to visit me at Lansmere; give me your address, and I will apprise you of the day on which I will request your presence. Leonard Fairfield shall find a father— I was about to say, worthy of himself. For the rest— stay; reseat yourself. For the rest"—and again the

sinister smile broke from Harley's eye and lip—"I will not yet say whether I can, or ought to, resign to a younger and fairer suitor the lady who has accepted my own hand. I have no reason yet to believe that she prefers him. But what think you, meanwhile, of this proposal? Mr Avenel wishes his nephew to contest the borough of Lansmere—has urged me to obtain the young man's consent. True, that he may thus endanger the seat of Mr Audley Egerton. What, then? Mr Audley Egerton is a great man, and may find another seat; that should not stand in the way. Let Leonard obey his uncle. If he win the election; why, he'll be a more equal match, in the world's eye, for Miss Digby—that is, should she prefer him to myself; and if she do not, still, in public life, there is a cure for all private sorrow. That is a maxim of Mr Audley Egerton's; and he, you know, is a man not only of the nicest honour, but the deepest worldly wisdom. Do you like my proposition?"

"It seems to me most considerate—most generous."

"Then you shall take to Leonard the lines I am about to write."

LORD L'ESTRANGE to LEONARD FAIRFIELD.

"I have read the memoir you intrusted to me. I will follow up all the clues that it gives me. Meanwhile I request you to suspend all questions—forbear all reference to a subject which, as you may well conjecture, is fraught with painful recollections to myself. At this moment, too, I am compelled to concentre my

thoughts upon affairs of a public nature, and yet which may sensibly affect yourself. There are reasons why I urge you to comply with your uncle's wish, and stand for the borough of Lansmere at the approaching election. If the exquisite gratitude of your nature so overrates what I may have done for you, that you think you owe me some obligations, you will richly repay them on the day in which I hear you hailed as member for Lansmere. Relying on that generous principle of self-sacrifice which actuates all your conduct, I shall count upon your surrendering your preference to private life, and entering the arena of that noble ambition which has conferred such dignity on the name of my friend Audley Egerton. He, it is true, will be your opponent; but he is too generous not to pardon my zeal for the interests of a youth whose career I am vain enough to think that I have aided. And as Mr Randal Leslie stands in coalition with Egerton, and Mr Avenel believes that two candidates of the same party cannot both succeed, the result may be to the satisfaction of all the feelings which I entertain for Audley Egerton, and for you, who, I have reason to think, will emulate his titles to my esteem.—Yours,

"L'Estrange."

"There, Mr Dale," said Harley, sealing his letter, and giving it into the Parson's hands. "There, you shall deliver this note to your friend. But no—upon second thoughts, since he does not yet know of your visit to me, it is best that he should be still in ignorance

of it. For should Miss Digby resolve to abide by her present engagements, it were surely kind to save Leonard the pain of learning that you had communicated to me that rivalry he himself had concealed. Let all that has passed between us be kept in strict confidence."

"I will obey you, my lord," answered the Parson, meekly, startled to find that he who had come to arrogate authority, was now submitting to commands; and all at fault what judgment he could venture to pass upon the man whom he had regarded as a criminal, who had not even denied the crime imputed to him, yet who now impressed the accusing priest with something of that respect which Mr Dale had never before conceded but to Virtue. Could he have then but looked into the dark and stormy heart, which he *twice* misread!

"It is well—very well," muttered Harley, when the door had closed upon the Parson. "The viper and the viper's brood! So it was this man's son that I led from the dire Slough of Despond; and the son unconsciously imitates the father's gratitude and honour—Ha!—ha!" Suddenly the bitter laugh was arrested; a flash of almost celestial joy darted through the warring elements of storm and darkness. If Helen returned Leonard's affection, Harley L'Estrange was free! And through that flash the face of Violante shone upon him as an angel's. But the heavenly light and the angel face vanished abruptly, swallowed up in the black abyss of the rent and tortured soul.

"Fool!" said the unhappy man, aloud, in his

anguish—"fool! what then? Were I free, would it be to trust my fate again to falsehood? If, in all the bloom and glory of my youth, I failed to win the heart of a village girl—if, once more deluding myself, it is in vain that I have tended, reared, cherished, some germ of woman's human affection in the orphan I saved from penury—how look for love in the brilliant princess, whom all the sleek Lotharios of our gaudy world will surround with their homage when once she alights on their sphere! If perfidy be my fate—what hell of hells in the thought!—that a wife might lay her head in my bosom—and—oh, horror! horror!—No!—I would not accept her hand were it offered, nor believe in her love were it pledged to me! Stern soul of mine—wise at last, love never more—never more believe in truth!"

CHAPTER XVI.

As Harley quitted the room, Helen's pale sweet face looked forth from a door in the same corridor. She advanced towards him timidly.

"May I speak with you?" she said, in almost inaudible accents. "I have been listening for your footstep."

Harley looked at her steadfastly. Then, without a word, he followed her into the room she had left, and closed the door.

"I, too," said he, "meant to seek an interview with yourself—but later. You would speak to me, Helen—say on,—Ah! child, what mean you? Why this?"—for Helen was kneeling at his feet.

"Let me kneel," she said, resisting the hand that sought to raise her. "Let me kneel till I have explained all, and perhaps won your pardon. You said something the other evening. It has weighed on my heart and my conscience ever since. You said, 'that I should have no secret from you: for *that*, in our relation to each other, would be deceit.' I have had a secret; but, oh, believe me! it was long ere it was clearly visible to myself. You honoured me with a suit

so far beyond my birth, my merits. You said that I might console and comfort you. At those words, what answer could I give?—I, who owe you so much more than a daughter's duty? And I thought that my affections were free—that they would obey that duty. But—but—but—" continued Helen, bowing her head still lowlier, and in a voice far fainter—"I deceived myself. I again saw *him* who had been all in the world to me, when the world was so terrible—and then—and then—I trembled. I was terrified at my own memories—my own thoughts. Still I struggled to banish the past—resolutely—firmly. Oh, you believe me, do you not? And I hoped to conquer. Yet ever since those words of yours, I felt that I ought to tell you even of the struggle. This is the first time we have met since you spoke them. And now—now—I have seen him again, and—and—though not by a word could she you had deigned to woo as your bride encourage hope in another—though there—there where you now stand—he bade me farewell, and we parted as if for ever;—yet—yet—O Lord L'Estrange! in return for your rank, wealth, your still nobler gifts of nature—what should I bring?—something more than gratitude, esteem, reverence—at least an undivided heart, filled with your image, and yours alone. And this I cannot give. Pardon me—not for what I say now, but for not saying it before. Pardon me—O my benefactor, pardon me!"

"Rise, Helen," said Harley, with relaxing brow, though still unwilling to yield to one softer and holier

emotion. "Rise!" And he lifted her up, and drew her towards the light. "Let me look at your face. There seems no guile here. These tears are surely honest. If I cannot be loved, it is my fate, and not your crime. Now, listen to me. If you grant me nothing else, will you give me the obedience which the ward owes to the guardian—the child to the parent?"

"Yes—oh yes!" murmured Helen.

"Then while I release you from all troth to me, I claim the right to refuse, if I so please it, my assent to the suit of—of the person you prefer. I acquit you of deceit, but I reserve to myself the judgment I shall pass on him. Until I myself sanction that suit, will you promise not to recall in any way the rejection which, if I understand you rightly, you have given to it?"

"I promise."

"And if I say to you, 'Helen, this man is not worthy of you—'"

"No, no! do not say that—I could not believe you."

Harley frowned, but resumed calmly—"If, then, I say, 'Ask me not wherefore, but I forbid you to be the wife of Leonard Fairfield,' what would be your answer?"

"Ah, my lord, if you can but comfort him, do with me as you will; but do not command me to break his heart."

"Oh, silly child," cried Harley, laughing scornfully, "hearts are not found in the race from which that man sprang. But I take your promise, with its credulous condition. Helen, I pity you. I have been as weak as you, bearded man though I be. Some day or other, you

and I may live to laugh at the follies at which you weep now. I can give you no other comfort, for I know of none."

He moved to the door, and paused at the threshold. "I shall not see you again for some days, Helen. Perhaps I may request my mother to join me at Lansmere; if so, I shall pray you to accompany her. For the present, let all believe that our position is unchanged. The time will soon come when I may——"

Helen looked up wistfully through her tears.

"I may release you from all duties to me," continued Harley, with grave and severe coldness; "or I may claim your promise in spite of the condition; for your lover's heart will not be broken. Adieu!"

CHAPTER XVII.

As Harley entered London, he came suddenly upon Randal Leslie, who was hurrying from Eaton Square, having not only accompanied Mr Avenel in his walk, but gone home with him, and spent half the day in that gentleman's society. He was now on his way to the House of Commons, at which some disclosure as to the day for the dissolution of Parliament was expected.

"Lord L'Estrange," said Randal, "I must stop you. I have been to Norwood, and seen our noble friend. He has confided to me, of course, all that passed. How can I express my gratitude to you! By what rare talent—with what signal courage—you have saved the happiness—perhaps even the honour—of my plighted bride!"

"Your bride! The Duke, then, still holds to the promise you were fortunate enough to obtain from Dr Riccabocca?"

"He confirms that promise more solemnly than ever. You may well be surprised at his magnanimity."

"No; he is a philosopher—nothing in him can surprise me. But he seemed to think, when I saw him,

that there were circumstances you might find it hard to explain."

"Hard! nothing so easy. Allow me to tender to you the same explanations which satisfied one whom philosophy itself has made as open to truth as he is clear-sighted to imposture."

"Another time, Mr Leslie. If your bride's father be satisfied, what right have I to doubt? By the way, you stand for Lansmere. Do me the favour to fix your quarters at the Park during the election. You will, of course, accompany Mr Egerton."

"You are most kind," answered Randal, greatly surprised.

"You accept? That is well. We shall then have ample opportunity for those explanations which you honour me by offering; and, to make your visit still more agreeable, I may, perhaps, induce our friends at Norwood to meet you. Good-day."

Harley walked on, leaving Randal motionless in amaze, but tormented with suspicion. What could such courtesies in Lord L'Estrange portend? Surely no good.

"I am about to hold the balance of justice," said Harley to himself.—"I will cast the light-weight of that knave into the scale. Violante never can be mine: but I did not save her from a Peschiera to leave her to a Randal Leslie. Ha, ha! Audley Egerton has some human feeling—tenderness for that youth whom he has selected from the world, in which he left Nora's child

to the jaws of Famine. Through that side I can reach at his heart, and prove him a fool like myself, where he esteemed and confided! Good."

Thus soliloquising, Lord L'Estrange gained the corner of Bruton Street, when he was again somewhat abruptly accosted.

"My dear Lord L'Estrange, let me shake you by the hand; for Heaven knows when I may see you again; and you have suffered me to assist in one good action."

"Frank Hazeldean, I am pleased indeed to meet you. Why do you indulge in that melancholy doubt as to the time when I may see you again?"

"I have just got leave of absence. I am not well, and I am rather hipped, so I shall go abroad for a few weeks."

In spite of himself, the sombre brooding man felt interest and sympathy in the dejection that was evident in Frank's voice and countenance. "Another dupe to affection," thought he, as if in apology to himself;—"of course, a dupe; he is honest and artless—at present." He pressed kindly on the arm which he had involuntarily twined within his own. "I conceive how you now grieve, my young friend," said he; "but you will congratulate yourself hereafter on what this day seems to you an affliction."

"My dear Lord——"

"I am much older than you, but not old enough for such formal ceremony. Pray, call me L'Estrange."

"Thank you; and I should indeed like to speak to you as a friend.—There is a thought on my mind which

haunts me. I daresay it is foolish enough, but I am sure *you* will not laugh at me. You heard what Madame di Negra said to me last night. I have been trifled with and misled, but I cannot forget so soon how dear to me that woman was. I am not going to bore you with such nonsense; but from what I can understand, her brother is likely to lose all his fortune; and, even if not, he is a sad scoundrel. I cannot bear the thought that she should be so dependent on him—that she may come to want.—After all there must be good in her—good in her to refuse my hand if she did not love me. A mercenary woman so circumstanced would not have done that."

"You are quite right. But do not torment yourself with such generous fears. Madame di Negra shall not come to want—shall not be dependent on her infamous brother. The first act of the Duke of Serrano, on regaining his estates, will be a suitable provision for his kinswoman. I will answer for this."

"You take a load off my mind. I did mean to ask you to intercede with Riccabocca—that is, the Duke (it is so hard to think he can be a Duke!) I, alas! have nothing in my power to bestow upon Madame di Negra. I may, indeed, sell my commission; but then I have a debt which I long to pay off, and the sale of the commission would not suffice even for that; and perhaps my father might be still more angry if I do sell it. Well, good-by. I shall now go away happy—that is, comparatively. One must bear things like—a man!"

"I should like, however, to see you again before you

go abroad. I will call on you. Meanwhile, can you tell me the number of one Baron Levy? He lives in this street I know."

"Levy! Oh, have no dealings with him, I advise—I entreat you! He is the most plausible, dangerous rascal; and, for Heaven's sake! pray be warned by me, and let nothing entangle you into—a POST-OBIT!"

"Be reassured, I am more accustomed to lend money than borrow it; and, as to a *post-obit*, I have a foolish prejudice against such transactions."

"Don't call it foolish, L'Estrange; I honour you for it. How I wish I had known you earlier—so few men of the world are like you. Even Randal Leslie, who is so faultless in most things, and never gets into a scrape himself, called my own scruples foolish. However——"

"Stay—Randal Leslie! What! He advised you to borrow on a *post-obit*, and probably shared the loan with you?"

"O no; not a shilling."

"Tell me all about it, Frank. Perhaps, as I see that Levy is mixed up in the affair, your information may be useful to myself, and put me on my guard in dealing with that popular gentleman."

Frank, who somehow or other felt himself quite at home with Harley, and who, with all his respect for Randal Leslie's talents, had a vague notion that Lord L'Estrange was quite as clever, and from his years and experience, likely to be a safer and more judicious

counsellor, was noways loath to impart the confidence thus pressed for.

He told Harley of his debts—his first dealings with Levy;—the unhappy *post-obit* into which he had been hurried by the distress of Madame di Negra;—his father's anger—his mother's letter—his own feelings of mingled shame and pride, which made him fear that repentance would but seem self-interest—his desire to sell his commission, and let its sale redeem in part the *post-obit;* in short, he made what is called a clean breast of it. Randal Leslie was necessarily mixed up with this recital; and the subtle cross-questionings of Harley extracted far more as to that young diplomatist's agency in all these melancholy concerns, than the ingenuous narrator himself was aware of.

"So then," said Harley, "Mr Leslie assured you of Madame di Negra's affection, when you yourself doubted of it?"

"Yes: she took him in, even more than she did me."

"Simple Mr Leslie! And the same kind friend—who is related to you—did you say?"

"His grandmother was a Hazeldean."

"Humph. The same kind relation led you to believe that you could pay off this bond with the Marchesa's portion, and that he could obtain the consent of your parents to your marriage with that lady?"

"I ought to have known better; my father's prejudices against foreigners and Papists are so strong."

"And now Mr Leslie concurs with you, that it is

best for you to go abroad, and trust to his intercession with your father. He has evidently, then, gained a great influence over Mr Hazeldean."

"My father naturally compares me with him—he so clever, so promising, so regular in his habits, and I such a reckless scapegrace."

"And the bulk of your father's property is unentailed—Mr Hazeldean might disinherit you?"

"I deserve it. I hope he will."

"You have no brothers nor sisters—no relation, perhaps, after your parents, nearer to you than your excellent friend Mr Randal Leslie?"

"No; that is the reason he is so kind to me, otherwise I am the last person to suit him. You have no idea how well-informed and clever he is," added Frank, in a tone between admiration and awe.

"My dear Hazeldean, you will take my advice—will you not?"

"Certainly. You are too good."

"Let all your family, Mr Leslie included, suppose you to be gone abroad; but stay quietly in England, and within a day's journey of Lansmere Park. I am obliged to go thither for the approaching election. I may ask you to come over. I think I see a way to serve you; and if so, you will soon hear from me. Now, Baron Levy's number?"

"That is the house with the cabriolet at the door. How such a fellow can have such a horse!—'tis out of all keeping!"

"Not at all; horses are high-spirited, generous, unsuspicious animals. They never know if it is a rogue who drives them. I have your promise, then, and you will send me your address?"

"I will. Strange that I feel more confidence in you than I do even in Randal! Do take care of Levy."

Lord L'Estrange and Frank here shook hands, and Frank, with an anxious groan, saw L'Estrange disappear within the portals of the sleek destroyer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Lord L'Estrange followed the spruce servant into Baron Levy's luxurious study.

The Baron looked greatly amazed at his unexpected visitor; but he got up—handed a chair to my lord with a low bow. "This *is* an honour," said he.

"You have a charming abode here," said Lord L'Estrange, looking round. "Very fine bronzes—excellent taste. Your reception-rooms above are, doubtless, a model to all decorators!"

"Would your lordship condescend to see them?" said Levy, wondering, but flattered.

"With the greatest pleasure."

"Lights!" cried Levy, to the servant who answered his bell. "Lights in the drawing-rooms—it is growing dark."

Lord L'Estrange followed the usurer up stairs; admired everything—pictures, draperies, Sèvres china, to the very shape of the downy *fauteuils*, to the very pattern of the Tournay carpets. Reclining then on one of the voluptuous sofas, Lord L'Estrange said, smilingly, "You are a wise man; there is no advantage in being rich, unless one enjoys one's riches."

"My own maxim, Lord L'Estrange."

"And it is something, too, to have a taste for good society. Small pride would you have, my dear Baron, in these rooms, luxurious though they are, if filled with guests of vulgar exterior and plebeian manners. It is only in the world in which *we* move that we find persons who harmonise, as it were, with the porcelain of Sèvres, and these sofas that might have come from Versailles."

"I own," said Levy, "that I have what some may call a weakness in a *parvenu* like myself. I have a love for the *beau monde*. It is indeed a pleasure to me when I receive men like your lordship."

"But why call yourself a *parvenu?* Though you are contented to honour the name of Levy, we, in society, all know that you are the son of a long-descended English peer. Child of love, it is true; but the Graces smile on those over whose birth Venus presided. Pardon my old-fashioned mythological similes —they go so well with these rooms—*Louis Quinze.*"

"Since you touch on my birth," said Levy, his colour rather heightening, not with shame, but with pride, "I don't deny that it has had some effect on my habits and tastes in life. In fact——"

"In fact, own that you would be a miserable man, in spite of all your wealth, if the young dandies, who throng to your banquets, were to cut you dead in the streets;—if, when your high-stepping horse stopped at your club, the porter shut the door in your face;—if, when you lounged into the opera-pit, handsome dog

that you are, each spendthrift rake in 'Fop's Alley,' who now waits but the scratch of your pen to endorse *billets-doux* with the charm that can chain to himself for a month some nymph of the *Ballet*, spinning round in a whirlwind of *tulle*,—would shrink from the touch of your condescending forefinger with more dread of its contact than a bailiff's tap in the thick of Pall Mall could inspire;—if, reduced to the company of city clerks, parasite led-captains——"

"Oh, don't go on, my dear Lord," cried Levy, laughing affectedly. "Impossible though the picture be, it is really appalling. Cut me off from May Fair and St James's, and I should go into my strong closet and hang myself."

"And yet, my dear Baron, all this may happen if I have the whim just to try;—all this *will* happen, unless, ere I leave your house, you concede the conditions I come here to impose."

"My Lord!" exclaimed Levy, starting up, and pulling down his waistcoat with nervous passionate fingers, "If you were not under my own roof, I would——"

"Truce, with mock heroics. Sit down, sir—sit down. I will briefly state my threat—more briefly my conditions. You will be scarcely more prolix in your reply. Your fortune I cannot touch—your enjoyment of it I can destroy. Refuse my conditions—make me your enemy—and war to the knife! I will interrogate all the young dupes you have ruined. I will learn the history of all the transactions by which you have gained

the wealth that it pleases you to spend in courting the society and sharing the vices of men who—go with these rooms, *Louis Quinze!* Not a roguery of yours shall escape me, down even to your last notable connivance with an Italian reprobate for the criminal abduction of an heiress. All these particulars I will proclaim in the clubs to which you have gained admittance—in every club in London which you yet hope to creep into. All these I will impart to some such authority in the Press as Mr Henry Norreys;—all these I will, upon the voucher of my own name, have so published in some journals of repute, that you must either tacitly submit to the revelations that blast you, or bring before a court of law actions that will convert accusations into evidence. It is but by sufferance that you are now in society—you are excluded when one man like me comes forth to denounce you. You try in vain to sneer at my menace—your white lips show your terror. I have rarely in life drawn any advantage from my rank and position; but I am thankful that they give me the power to make my voice respected and my exposure triumphant. Now, Baron Levy, will you go into your strong closet and hang yourself, or will you grant me my very moderate conditions? You are silent. I will relieve you, and state those conditions. Until the general election, about to take place, is concluded, you will obey me to the letter in all that I enjoin—no demur, and no scruple. And the first proof of obedience I demand is, your candid disclosure of all Mr Audley Egerton's pecuniary affairs."

"Has my client, Mr Egerton, authorised you to request of me that disclosure?"

"On the contrary, all that passes between us you will conceal from your client."

"You would save him from ruin? Your trusty *friend*, Mr Egerton!" said the Baron, with a livid sneer.

"Wrong again, Baron Levy. If I would save him from ruin, you are scarcely the man I should ask to assist me."

"Ah, I guess. You have learned how he——"

"Guess nothing, but obey in all things. Let us descend to your business-room."

Levy said not a word until he had reconducted his visitor into his den of destruction—all gleaming with *spoliaria* in rosewood. Then he said this: "If, Lord L'Estrange, you seek but revenge on Audley Egerton, you need not have uttered those threats. I too—hate the man."

Harley looked at him wistfully, and the nobleman felt a pang that he had debased himself into a single feeling which the usurer could share. Nevertheless, the interview appeared to close with satisfactory arrangements, and to produce amicable understanding. For as the Baron ceremoniously followed Lord L'Estrange through the hall, his noble visitor said, with marked affability—

"Then I shall see you at Lansmere with Mr Egerton, to assist in conducting his election. It is a sacrifice of your time worthy of your friendship; not a step farther,

I beg. Baron, I have the honour to wish you good evening."

As the street-door opened on Lord L'Estrange, he again found himself face to face with Randal Leslie, whose hand was already lifted to the knocker.

"Ha, Mr Leslie!—you too a client of Baron Levy's; —a very useful accommodating man."

Randal stared and stammered,—"I come in haste from the House of Commons on Mr Egerton's business. Don't you hear the newspaper vendors crying out—'Great news—Dissolution of Parliament?'"

"We are prepared. Levy himself consents to give us the aid of his talents. Kindly, obliging—clever person!"

Randal hurried into Levy's study, to which the usurer had shrunk back, and was now wiping his brow with his scented handkerchief, looking heated and haggard, and very indifferent to Randal Leslie.

"How is this?" cried Randal. "I come to tell you first of Peschiera's utter failure, the ridiculous coxcomb, and I meet at your door the last man I thought to find there—the man who foiled us all, Lord L'Estrange. What brought him to you? Ah, perhaps his interest in Egerton's election?"

"Yes," said Levy, sulkily. "I know all about Peschiera. I cannot talk to you now; I must make arrangements for going to Lansmere."

"But don't forget my purchase from Thornhill. I shall have the money shortly from a surer source than Peschiera."

"The Squire?"

"Or a rich father-in-law."

In the meanwhile, as Lord L'Estrange entered Bond Street, his ears were stunned by vociferous cries from the Stentors employed by *Standard*, *Sun*, and *Globe*—"Great news—Dissolution of Parliament—Great news!" The gas-lamps were lighted—a brown fog was gathering over the streets, blending itself with the falling shades of night. The forms of men loomed large through the mist. The lights from the shops looked red and lurid. Loungers usually careless as to politics, were talking eagerly and anxiously of King, Lords, Commons, "Constitution at stake"—"Triumph of liberal opinions," —according to their several biases. Hearing, and scorning—unsocial, isolated—walked on Harley L'Estrange. With his direr passions had been roused up all the native powers that made them doubly dangerous. He became proudly conscious of his own great faculties, but exulted in them only so far as they could minister to the purpose which had invoked them.

"I have constituted myself a Fate," he said, inly; "let the gods be but neutral—while I weave the meshes. Then, as Fate itself when it has fulfilled its mission, let me pass away into shadow, with the still and lonely stride that none may follow.

'Oh for a lodge in some vast wilderness.'

How weary I am of this world of men!" And again the cry "Great news—National crisis—Dissolution of Parliament—Great news!" rang through the jostling

throng. Three men, arm-in-arm, brushed by Harley, and were stopped at the crossing by a file of carriages. The man in the centre was Audley Egerton. His companions were an ex-minister like himself, and one of those great proprietors who are proud of being above office, and vain of the power to make and unmake Governments.

"You are the only man to lead us, Egerton," said this last personage. "Do but secure your seat, and as soon as this popular fever has passed away, you must be something more than the leader of Opposition—you must be the first man in England."

"Not a doubt of that," chimed in the fellow ex-minister—a worthy man—perfect red-tapist, but inaudible in the reporters' gallery. "And your election is quite safe, eh? All depends on that. You must not be thrown out at such a time, even for a month or two. I hear that you will have a contest—some townsman of the borough, I think. But the Lansmere interest must be all-powerful; and I suppose L'Estrange will come out and canvass for you. You are not the man to have lukewarm friends!"

"Don't be alarmed about my election. I am as sure of that as of L'Estrange's friendship."

Harley heard, with a grim smile, and passing his hand within his vest, laid it upon Nora's memoir.

"What could we do in Parliament without you!" said the great proprietor, almost piteously.

"Rather what could I do without Parliament? Public life is the only existence I own. Parliament is all in all to me. But we may cross now."

Harley's eye glittered cold as it followed the tall form of the statesman, towering high above all other passers-by.

"Ay," he muttered—"ay, rest as sure of my friendship as I was of thine! And be Lansmere our field of Philippi! There, where thy first step was made in the only life that thou own'st as existence, shall the ladder itself rot from under thy footing. There, where thy softer victim slunk to death from the deceit of thy love, shall deceit like thine own dig a grave for thy frigid ambition. I borrow thy quiver of fraud; its still arrows shall strike thee; and thou too shalt say, when the barb pierces home: 'This comes from the hand of a friend.' Ay, at Lansmere, at Lansmere, shall the end crown the whole! Go, and dot on the canvass the lines for a lengthened perspective, where my eyes note already the vanishing-point of the picture."

Then through the dull fog, and under the pale gas-lights, Harley L'Estrange pursued his noiseless way, soon distinguished no more amongst the various, motley, quick-succeeding groups, with their infinite subdivisions of thought, care, and passion; while loud over all their low murmurs, or silent hearts, were heard the tramp of horses and din of wheels, and the vociferous discordant cry that had ceased to attract an interest in the ears it vexed—"Great news, Great news—Dissolution of Parliament—Great news!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE scene is at Lansmere Park—a spacious pile, commenced in the reign of Charles II.; enlarged and altered in the reign of Anne. Brilliant interval in the History of our National Manners, when even the courtier dreaded to be dull, and Sir Fopling raised himself on tip-toe to catch the ear of a wit—when the names of Devonshire, and Dorset, Halifax and Carteret, Oxford and Bolingbroke, unite themselves, brother-like, with those of Hobbes and of Dryden, of Prior and Bentley, of Arbuthnot, Gay, Pope, and Swift; and still, wherever we turn, to recognise some ideal of great Lord or fine Gentleman—the Immortals of Literature stand by his side.

The walls of the rooms at Lansmere were covered with the portraits of those who illustrate that time which Europe calls the Age of Louis XIV. A L'Estrange, who had lived through the reigns of four English princes (and with no mean importance through all), had collected those likenesses of noble contemporaries. As you passed through the chambers—opening one on the other in that pomp of parade introduced

with Charles II. from the palaces of France, and retaining its mode till Versailles and the Trianon passed, themselves, out of date—you felt you were in excellent company. What saloons of our day, demeaned to tailed coats and white waistcoats, have that charm of high breeding which speaks out from the canvass of Kneller and Jervis, Vivien and Rigaud? And withal, notwithstanding lace and brocade—the fripperies of artificial costume—still those who give interest or charm to that day, look from their portraits like men—raking or *débonnaire*, if you will—never mincing nor feminine. Can we say as much of the portraits of Lawrence? Gaze there on fair Marlborough—what delicate perfection of features, yet how easy in boldness, how serene in the conviction of power! So fair and so tranquil he might have looked through the cannon-reek at Ramilies and Blenheim, suggesting to Addison the image of an angel of war. Ah, there, Sir Charles Sedley, the Lovelace of wits! Note that strong jaw and marked brow;—do you not recognise the courtier who scorned to ask one favour of the king with whom he lived as an equal, and who stretched forth the right hand of man to hurl from a throne the king who had made his daughter—a countess? *

* Sedley was so tenacious of his independence, that when his affairs were most embarrassed, he refused all pecuniary aid from Charles II. His bitter sarcasm, in vindication of the part he took in the deposition of James II., who had corrupted his daughter, and made her Countess of Dorchester, is well known. "As the King has made my daughter a Countess, the least I can do, in common gratitude, is to assist in making his majesty's daughter—a Queen!"

Perhaps, from his childhood thus surrounded by the haunting faces—that spoke of their age as they looked from the walls—that age and those portraits were not without influence on the character of Harley L'Estrange. The whim and the daring—the passion for letters and reverence for genius—the mixture of levity and strength—the polished sauntering indolence, or the elastic readiness of energies once called into action—all might have found their prototypes in the lives which those portraits rekindled. The deeper sentiment, the more earnest nature, which in Harley L'Estrange were commingled with the attributes common to a former age—these, indeed, were of his own. *Our* age so little comprehended, while it colours us from its atmosphere !—so full of mysterious and profound emotions, which our ancestors never knew !—Will those emotions be understood by our descendants ?

In this stately house were now assembled, as Harley's guests, many of the more important personages whom the slow length of this story has made familiar to the reader. The two candidates for the borough in the True Blue interest—Audley Egerton and Randal Leslie ;—and Levy—chief among the barons to whom modern society grants a seignory of pillage, which, had a baron of old ever ventured to arrogate, burgess and citizen, socman and bocman, villein and churl, would have burned him alive in his castle ; the Duke di Serrano, still fondly clinging to his title of doctor and pet name of Riccabocca ;—Jemima, not yet with the

airs of a duchess, but robed in very thick silks, as the chrysalis state of a duchess;—Violante, too, was there, sadly against her will, and shrinking as much as possible into the retirement of her own chamber. The Countess of Lansmere had deserted her lord, in order to receive the guests of her son; my lord himself, ever bent on being of use in some part of his country, and striving hard to distract his interest from his plague of a borough, had gone down into Cornwall to inquire into the social condition of certain troglodytes who worked in some mines which the Earl had lately had the misfortune to wring from the Court of Chancery, after a lawsuit commenced by his grandfather; and a Blue Book, issued in the past session by order of Parliament, had especially quoted the troglodytes thus devolved on the Earl as bipeds who were in considerable ignorance of the sun, and had never been known to wash their feet since the day that they came into the world—their world underground, chipped off from the Bottomless Pit!

With the Countess came Helen Digby, of course; and Lady Lansmere, who had hitherto been so civilly cold to the wife elect of her son, had, ever since her interview with Harley at Knightsbridge, clung to Helen with almost a caressing fondness. The stern Countess was tamed by fear; she felt that her own influence over Harley was gone; she trusted to the influence of Helen—in case of what?—ay, what? It was because the danger was not clear to her, that her bold spirit trembled: superstitions, like suspicions, are,

"as bats among birds, and fly by twilight." Harley had ridiculed the idea of challenge and strife between Audley and himself; but still Lady Lansmere dreaded the fiery emotions of the last, and the high spirit and austere self-respect which were proverbial to the first. Involuntarily she strengthened her intimacy with Helen. In case her alarm should appear justified, what mediator could be so persuasive in appeasing the angrier passions, as one whom courtship and betrothal sanctified to the gentlest?

On arriving at Lansmere, the Countess, however, felt somewhat relieved. Harley had received her, if with a manner less cordial and tender than had hitherto distinguished it, still with easy kindness and calm self-possession. His bearing towards Audley Egerton still more reassured her: it was not marked by an exaggeration of familiarity or friendship—which would at once have excited her apprehensions of some sinister design,—nor, on the other hand, did it betray, by covert sarcasms, an ill-suppressed resentment. It was exactly what, under the circumstances, would have been natural to a man who had received an injury from an intimate friend, which, in generosity or discretion, he resolved to overlook, but which those aware of it could just perceive had cooled or alienated the former affection. Indefatigably occupying himself with all the details of the election, Harley had fair pretext for absenting himself from Audley, who, really looking very ill, and almost worn out, pleaded indisposition as an excuse for dispensing with the fatigues of a personal canvass,

and, passing much of his time in his own apartments, left all the preparations for contest to his more active friends. It was not till he had actually arrived at Lansmere that Audley became acquainted with the name of his principal opponent. Richard Avenel! the brother of Nora! rising up from obscurity, thus to stand front to front against him in a contest on which all his fates were cast. Egerton quailed as before an appointed avenger. He would fain have retired from the field;—he spoke to Harley!

"How can *you* support all the painful remembrances which the very name of my antagonist must conjure up?"

"Did you not tell me," answered Harley, "to strive against such remembrances—to look on them as sickly dreams? I am prepared to brave them. Can you be more sensitive than I?"

Egerton durst not say more. He avoided all further reference to the subject. The strife raged around him, and he shut himself out from it—shut himself up in solitude with his own heart. Strife enough there! Once, late at night, he stole forth and repaired to Nora's grave. He stood there, amidst the rank grass, and under the frosty starlight, long, and in profound silence. His whole past life seemed to rise before him; and, when he regained his lonely room, and strove to survey the future, still he could behold only that past and that grave.

In thus declining all active care for an election, to his prospects so important, Audley Egerton was con-

sidered to have excuse, not only in the state of his health, but in his sense of dignity. A statesman so eminent, of opinions so well known, of public services so incontestable, might well be spared the personal trouble that falls upon obscurer candidates. And besides, according to current report, and the judgment of the Blue Committee, the return of Mr Egerton was secure. But, though Audley himself was thus indulgently treated, Harley and the Blue Committee took care to inflict double work upon Randal. That active young spirit found ample materials for all its restless energies. Randal Leslie was kept on his legs from sunrise to starlight. There does not exist in the Three Kingdoms a constituency more fatiguing to a candidate than that borough of Lansmere. As soon as you leave the High Street, wherein, according to immemorial usage, the Blue canvasser is first led, in order to put him into spirits for the toils that await him (delectable, propitious, constitutional High Street, in which at least two-thirds of the electors—opulent tradesmen employed at the Park—always vote for "my lord's man," and hospitably prepare wine and cakes in their tidy back-parlours!)—as soon as you quit this stronghold of the party, labyrinths of lanes and defiles stretch away into the farthest horizon; level ground is found nowhere; it is all up-hill and down-hill—now rough craggy pavements that blister the feet, and at the very first tread upon which all latent corns shook prophetically—now deep muddy ruts, into which you sink ankle-deep—oozing slush creeping into the pores, and moistening the

way for catarrh, rheum, cough, sore throat, bronchitis, and phthisis. Black sewers, and drains Acherontian, running before the thresholds, and so filling the homes behind with effluvia, that, while one hand clasps the grimy paw of the voter, the other instinctively guards from typhus and cholera your abhorrent nose. Not in those days had mankind ever heard of a sanitary reform! and, to judge of the slow progress which that reform seems to make, sewer and drain would have been much the same if they had. Scot-and-lot voters were the independent electors of Lansmere, with the additional franchise of Freemen. Universal suffrage could scarcely more efficiently swamp the franchises of men who care a straw what becomes of Great Britain! With all Randal Leslie's profound diplomacy, all his art in talking over, deceiving, and (to borrow Dick Avenel's vernacular phrase) "humbugging" educated men, his eloquence fell flat upon minds invulnerable to appeals whether to State or to Church, to Reform or to Freedom. To catch a Scot-and-lot voter by such frivolous arguments, Randal Leslie might as well have tried to bring down a rhinoceros by a popgun charged with split peas! The young man who so firmly believed that "knowledge was power," was greatly disgusted. It was here the ignorance that foiled him. When he got hold of a man with some knowledge, Randal was pretty sure to trick him out of a vote.

Nevertheless, Randal Leslie walked and talked on, with most creditable perseverance. The Blue Committee allowed that he was an excellent canvasser.

They conceived a liking for him, mingled with pity. For, though sure of Egerton's return, they regarded Randal's as out of the question. He was merely there to keep split votes from going to the opposite side; to serve his patron, the ex-minister; shake the paws and smell the smells which the ex-minister was too great a man to shake and to smell. But, in point of fact, none of that Blue Committee knew anything of the prospects of the election. Harley received all the reports of each canvass-day. Harley kept the canvass-book, locked up from all eyes but his own, or it might be Baron Levy's, as Audley Egerton's confidential, if not strictly professional adviser;—Baron Levy, the millionnaire, had long since retired from all acknowledged professions. Randal, however—close, observant, shrewd—perceived that he himself was much stronger than the Blue Committee believed. And, to his infinite surprise, he owed that strength to Lord L'Estrange's exertions on his behalf. For though Harley, after the first day on which he ostentatiously showed himself in the High Street, did not openly canvass with Randal, yet when the reports were brought in to him, and he saw the names of the voters who gave one vote to Audley, and withheld the other from Randal, he would say to Randal, dead beat as that young gentleman was, "Slip out with me, the moment dinner is over, and before you go the round of the public houses; there are some voters we must get for you to-night." And sure enough a few kindly words from the popular heir of the Lansmere baronies usually gained over the electors, from whom, though

Randal had proved that all England depended on their votes in his favour, Randal would never have extracted more than a "Wu'll, I shall waute gin the Dauy coomes!" Nor was this all that Harley did for the younger candidate. If it was quite clear that only one vote could be won for the Blues, and the other was pledged to the Yellows, Harley would say, "Then put it down to Mr Leslie;"—a request the more readily conceded, since Audley Egerton was considered so safe by the Blues, and alone worth a fear by the Yellows.

Thus Randal, who kept a snug little canvass-book of his own, became more and more convinced that he had a better chance than Egerton, even without the furtive aid he expected from Avenel; and he could only account for Harley's peculiar exertions in his favour, by supposing that Harley, unpractised in elections, and deceived by the Blue Committee, believed Egerton to be perfectly safe, and sought, for the honour of the family interest, to secure *both* the seats.

Randal's public cares thus deprived him of all opportunity of pressing his courtship on Violante; and, indeed, if ever he did find a moment in which he could steal to her reluctant side, Harley was sure to seize that very moment to send him off to canvass an hesitating freeman, or harangue in some public-house.

Leslie was too acute not to detect some motive hostile to his wooing, however plausibly veiled in the guise of zeal for his election, in this officiousness of Harley's. But Lord L'Estrange's manner to Violante was so little like that of a jealous lover, and he was so well aware of

her engagement to Randal, that the latter abandoned the suspicion he had before conceived, that Harley was his rival. And he was soon led to believe that Lord L'Estrange had another, more disinterested, and less formidable motive for thus stinting his opportunities to woo the heiress.

"Mr Leslie," said Lord L'Estrange, one day, "the Duke has confided to me his regret at his daughter's reluctance to ratify his own promise; and, knowing the warm interest I take in her welfare—for his sake and her own; believing also, that some services to herself, as well as to the father she so loves, give me a certain influence over her inexperienced judgment, he has even requested me to speak a word to her in your behalf."

"Ah! if you would!" said Randal, surprised.

"You must give me the power to do so. You were obliging enough to volunteer to me the same explanations which you gave to the Duke, his satisfaction with which induced him to renew or confirm the promise of his daughter's hand. Should those explanations content me, as they did him, I hold the Duke bound to fulfil his engagement, and I am convinced that his daughter would, in that case, not be inflexible to your suit. But, till such explanations be given, my friendship for the father, and my interest in the child, do not allow me to assist a cause which, however, at present, suffers little by delay."

"Pray, listen at once to those explanations."

"Nay, Mr Leslie, I can only think of the election.

As soon as that is over, rely on it you shall have the amplest opportunity to dispel any doubts which your intimacy with Count di Peschiera and Madame di Negra may have suggested. Apropos of the election—here is a list of voters you must see at once in Fish Lane. —Don't lose a moment."

In the meanwhile, Richard Avenel and Leonard had taken up their quarters in the hotel appropriated to the candidates for the Yellows; and the canvass on that side was prosecuted with all the vigour which might be expected from operations conducted by Richard Avenel, and backed by the popular feeling.

The rival parties met from time to time, in the streets and lanes, in all the pomp of war—banners streaming, fifes resounding (for bands and colours were essential proofs of public spirit, and indispensable items in a candidate's bills, in those good old days). When they thus encountered, very distant bows were exchanged between the respective chiefs. But Randal, contriving ever to pass close to Avenel, had ever the satisfaction of perceiving that gentleman's countenance contracted into a knowing wink, as much as to say, "All right, in spite of this tarnation humbug."

But now that both parties were fairly in the field, to the private arts of canvassing were added the public arts of oratory. The candidates had to speak—at the close of each day's canvass—out from wooden boxes, suspended from the windows of their respective hotels, and which looked like dens for the exhibition of wild beasts. They had to speak at meetings of Committees

—meetings of electors—go the nightly round of enthusiastic public-houses, and appeal to the sense of an enlightened people through wreaths of smoke and odours of beer.

The alleged indisposition of Audley Egerton had spared him the excitement of oratory, as well as the fatigue of canvassing. The practised debater had limited the display of his talents to a concise, but clear and masterly exposition of his own views on the leading public questions of the day, and the state of parties, which, on the day after his arrival at Lansmere, was delivered at a meeting of his general Committee—in the great room of their hotel—and which was then printed and circulated amongst the voters.

Randal, though he expressed himself with more fluency and self-possession than are usually found in the first attempts of a public speaker, was not effective in adressing an unlettered crowd;—for a crowd of this kind is all heart,—and we know that Randal Leslie's heart was as small as heart could be. If he attempted to speak at his own intellectual level, he was so subtle and refining as to be incomprehensible; if he fell into the fatal error—not uncommon to inexperienced orators—of trying to lower himself to the intellectual level of his audience, he was only elaborately stupid. No man can speak too well for a crowd—as no man can write too well for the stage; but in neither case should he be rhetorical, or case in periods the dry bones of reasoning. It is to the emotions, or to the humours, that the speaker of a crowd must address himself; his eye

must brighten with generous sentiment, or his lip must expand in the play of animated fancy or genial wit. Randal's voice, too, though pliant and persuasive in private conversation, was thin and poor when strained to catch the ear of a numerous assembly. The falsehood of his nature seemed to come out, when he raised the tones which had been drilled into deceit. Men like Randal Leslie may become sharp debaters—admirable special pleaders; they can no more become orators than they can become poets. Educated audiences are essential to them, and the smaller the audience (that is, the more the brain supersedes the action of the heart) the better they can speak.

Dick Avenel was generally very short and very pithy in his addresses. He had two or three favourite topics, which always told. He was a fellow townsman —a man who had made his own way in life—he wanted to free his native place from aristocratic usurpation—it was the battle of the electors, not his private cause, &c. He said little against Randal—"Pity a clever young man should pin his future to two yards of worn-out red tape"—"He had better lay hold of the strong rope, which the People, in compassion to his youth, were willing yet to throw out to save him from sinking," &c. But as for Audley Egerton, "the gentleman who would not show, who was afraid to meet the electors, who could only find his voice in a hole-and-corner meeting, accustomed all his venal life to dark and nefarious jobs"—Dick, upon that subject, delivered philippics truly Demosthenian. Leonard, on the con-

trary, never attacked Harley's friend, Mr Egerton; but he was merciless against the youth who had filched reputation from John Burley, and whom he knew that Harley despised as heartily as himself. And Randal did not dare to retaliate (though boiling over with indignant rage), for fear of offending Leonard's uncle. Leonard was unquestionably the popular speaker of the three. Though his temperament was a writer's, not an orator's—though he abhorred what he considered the theatrical exhibition of self, which makes what is called "delivery" more effective than ideas—though he had little interest, at any time, in party politics—though at this time his heart was far away from the Blues and Yellows of Lansmere, sad and forlorn—yet, forced into action, the eloquence that was natural to his conversation poured itself forth. He had warm blood in his veins; and his dislike to Randal gave poignancy to his wit, and barbed his arguments with impassioned invective. In fact, Leonard could conceive no other motive for Lord L'Estrange's request to take part in the election, than that nobleman's desire to defeat the man whom they both regarded as an impostor. And this notion was confirmed by some inadvertent expressions which Avenel let fall, and which made Leonard suspect that, if he were not in the field, Avenel would have exerted all his interest to return Randal instead of Egerton. With Dick's dislike to that statesman, Leonard found it impossible to reason; nor, on the other hand, could all Dick's scoldings or coaxings induce Leonard to divert his siege on Randal

to an assault upon the man who, Harley had often said, was dear to him as a brother.

In the meanwhile, Dick kept the canvass-book of the Yellows as closely as Harley kept that of the Blues; and, in despite of many pouting fits and gusts of displeasure, took precisely the same pains for Leonard as Harley took for Randal. There remained, however, apparently unshaken by the efforts on either side, a compact body of about a hundred and fifty voters, chiefly freemen. Would they vote Yellow? Would they vote Blue? No one could venture to decide; but they declared that they would all vote the same way. Dick kept his secret "caucuses," as he called them, constantly nibbling at this phalanx. A hundred and fifty voters! —they had the election in their hands! Never were hands so cordially shaken—so caressingly clung to—so fondly lingered upon! But the votes still stuck as firm to the hands as if a part of the skin, or of the dirt —which was much the same thing!

CHAPTER XX.

WHENEVER Audley joined the other guests of an evening—while Harley was perhaps closeted with Levy and committee-men, and Randal was going the round of the public-houses—the one with whom he chiefly conversed was Violante. He had been struck at first, despite his gloom, less, perhaps, by her extraordinary beauty, than by something in the expression of her countenance which, despite differences in feature and complexion, reminded him of Nora; and when, by his praises of Harley, he drew her attention, and won into her liking, he discovered, perhaps, that the likeness which had thus impressed him came from some similarities in character between the living and the lost one—the same charming combination of lofty thought and childlike innocence—the same enthusiasm—the same rich exuberance of imagination and feeling. Two souls that resemble each other will give their likeness to the looks from which they beam. On the other hand, the person with whom Harley most familiarly associated, in his rare intervals of leisure, was Helen Digby. One day, Audley Egerton, standing mourn-

fully by the window of the sitting-room appropriated to his private use, saw the two, whom he believed still betrothed, take their way across the park, side by side. "Pray Heaven, that she may atone to him for all!" murmured Audley. "But ah, that it had been Violante! Then I might have felt assured that the Future would efface the Past—and found the courage to tell him all. And when last night I spoke of what Harley ought to be to England, how like were Violante's eyes and smile to Nora's, when Nora listened in delighted sympathy to the hopes of my own young ambition." With a sigh he turned away, and resolutely sat down to read and reply to the voluminous correspondence which covered the table of the busy public man. For, Audley's return to Parliament being considered by his political party as secure, to him were transmitted all the hopes and fears of the large and influential section of it whose members looked up to him as their future chief, and who in that general election (unprecedented for the number of eminent men it was fated to expel from Parliament, and the number of new politicians it was fated to send into it), drew their only hopes of regaining their lost power from Audley's sanguine confidence in the reaction of that Public Opinion which he had hitherto so profoundly comprehended; and it was too clearly seen, that the seasonable adoption of his counsels would have saved the existence and popularity of the late Administration, whose most distinguished members could now scarcely show themselves on the hustings.

Meanwhile, Lord L'Estrange led his young companion towards a green hill in the centre of the Park, on which stood a circular temple, that commanded a view of the country round for miles. They had walked in silence till they gained the summit of the sloped and gradual ascent; and then, as they stood still, side by side, Harley thus spoke—

"Helen, you know that Leonard is in the town, though I cannot receive him at the Park, since he is standing in opposition to my guests, Egerton and Leslie."

HELEN.—"But that seems to me so strange. How —how could Leonard do anything that seems hostile to you?"

HARLEY.—"Would his hostility to me lower him in your opinion? If he know that I am his rival, does not rivalry include hate?"

HELEN.—"Oh, Lord L'Estrange, how can you speak thus?—how so wrong yourself? Hate—hate to you! and from Leonard Fairfield!"

HARLEY.—"You evade my question. Would his hate or hostility to me affect your sentiments towards him?"

HELEN (looking down).—"I could not force myself to believe in it."

HARLEY.—"Why?"

HELEN.—"Because it would be so unworthy of him."

HARLEY.—"Poor child! You have the delusion of your years. You deck a cloud in the hues of the rain-

bow, and will not believe that its glory is borrowed from the sun of your own fancy. But here, at least, you are not deceived. Leonard obeys but my wishes, and, I believe, against his own will. He has none of man's noblest attribute, Ambition."

HELEN.—"No ambition!"

HARLEY.—"It is vanity that stirs the poet to toil—if toil the wayward chase of his own chimeras can be called. Ambition is a more masculine passion."

Helen shook her head gently, but made no answer.

HARLEY.—"If I utter a word that profanes one of your delusions, you shake your head, and are incredulous. Pause: listen one moment to my counsels—perhaps the last I may ever obtrude upon you. Lift your eyes; look around. Far as your eye can reach, nay, far beyond the line which the horizon forms in the landscape, stretch the lands of my inheritance. Yonder you see the home in which my forefathers for many generations lived with honour and died lamented. All these, in the course of nature, might one day have been your own, had you not rejected my proposals. I offered you, it is true, not what is commonly called Love; I offered you sincere esteem, and affections the more durable for their calm. You have not been reared by the world in the low idolatry of rank and wealth. But even romance cannot despise the power of serving others, which rank and wealth bestow. For myself, hitherto indolence, and lately disdain, rob fortune of these nobler attributes. But she who will share my fortune may dispense it so as to atone for my

sins of omission. On the other side, grant that there is no bar to your preference for Leonard Fairfield, what does your choice present to you?—Those of his kindred with whom you will associate are unrefined and mean. His sole income is derived from precarious labours; the most vulgar of all anxieties—the fear of bread itself for the morrow—must mingle with all your romance, and soon steal from love all its poetry. You think his affection will console you for every sacrifice. Folly!—the love of poets is for a mist—a moonbeam—a denizen of air—a phantom that they call an Ideal. They suppose for a moment that they have found that Ideal in Chloe or Phyllis—Helen or a milkmaid. Bah! —the first time you come to the poet with the baker's bill, where flies the Ideal? I knew one more brilliant than Leonard—more exquisitely gifted by nature—that one was a woman: she saw a man hard and cold as that stone at your feet—a false, hollow, sordid worldling; she made him her idol—beheld in him all that history would not recognise in a Cæsar—that mythology would scarcely grant to an Apollo: to him she was the plaything of an hour—she died, and before the year was out he had married for money! I knew another instance—I speak of myself. I loved before I was your age. Had an angel warned me then, I would have been incredulous as you. How that ended, no matter: but had it not been for that dream of maudlin delirium, I had lived and acted as others of my kind and my sphere—married from reason and judgment—been now a useful and happy man. Pause, then.

Will you still reject me for Leonard Fairfield? For the last time you have the option—me and all the substance of waking life—Leonard Fairfield and the shadows of a fleeting dream. Speak! You hesitate. Nay, take time to decide."

HELEN.—"Ah, Lord L'Estrange, you who have felt what it is to love, how can you doubt my answer?—how think that I could be so base, so ungrateful as take from yourself what you call the substance of waking life, while my heart was far away—faithful to what you call a dream?"

HARLEY.—"But, can you not dispel the dream?"

HELEN (her whole face one flush).—"It was wrong to call it dream! It is the reality of life to me. All things else are as dreams."

HARLEY (taking her hand and kissing it with respect).—"Helen, you have a noble heart, and I have tempted you in vain. I regret your choice, though I will no more oppose it. I regret it, though I shall never witness your disappointment. As the wife of that man, I shall see and know you no more."

HELEN.—"Oh, no!—do not say that. Why?—wherefore?"

HARLEY (his brows meeting).—"He is the child of fraud and of shame. His father is my foe, and my hate descends to the son. He, too, the son, filches from me——but complaints are idle. When the next few days are over, think of me but as one who abandons all right over your actions, and is a stranger to your future fate. Pooh!—dry your tears: so long as you

love Leonard or esteem me, rejoice that our paths do not cross."

He walked on impatiently; but Helen, alarmed and wondering, followed close, took his arm timidly, and sought to soothe him. She felt that he wronged Leonard—that he knew not how Leonard had yielded all hope when he learned to whom she was affianced. For Leonard's sake she conquered her bashfulness, and sought to explain. But at her first hesitating faltered words, Harley, who with great effort suppressed the emotions which swelled within him, abruptly left her side, and plunged into the recesses of thick far-spreading groves, that soon wrapt him from her eye.

While this conversation occurred between Lord L'Estrange and his word, the *soi-disant* Riccabocca and Violante were walking slowly through the gardens. The philosopher, unchanged by his brightening prospects —so far as the outer man was concerned—still characterised by the red umbrella and the accustomed pipe—took the way mechanically towards the sunniest quarter of the grounds, now and then glancing tenderly at Violante's downcast melancholy face, but not speaking; only, at each glance, there came a brisker cloud from the pipe, as if obedient to a fuller heave of the heart.

At length, in a spot which lay open towards the south, and seemed to collect all the gentlest beams of the November sun, screened from the piercing east by dense evergreens, and flanked from the bleak north by lofty walls, Riccabocca paused and seated himself. Flowers still bloomed on the sward in front, over which

still fluttered the wings of those later and more brilliant butterflies that, unseen in the genial days of our English summer, come with autumnal skies, and sport round the mournful steps of the coming winter—types of those thoughts which visit and delight the contemplation of age, while the current yet glides free from the iron ice, and the leaves yet linger on the boughs; thoughts that associate the memories of the departed summer with messages from suns that shall succeed the winter, and expand colours the most steeped in light and glory, just as the skies through which they gleam are darkening, and the flowers on which they hover fade from the surface of the earth—dropping still seeds, that sink deep out of sight below.

"Daughter," said Riccabocca, drawing Violante to his side, with caressing arm—"Daughter! Mark, how they who turn towards the south can still find the sunny side of the landscape! In all the seasons of life, how much of chill or of warmth depends on our choice of the aspect! Sit down—let us reason."

Violante sat down passively, clasping her father's hand in both her own. Reason!—harsh word to the ears of Feeling!

"You shrink," resumed Riccabocca, "from even the courtship, even the presence of the suitor in whom my honour binds me to recognise your future bridegroom."

Violante drew away her hands, and placed them before her eyes, shudderingly.

"But," continued Riccabocca, rather peevishly, "this is not listening to reason. I may object to Mr Leslie,

because he has not an adequate rank or fortune to pretend to a daughter of my house; that would be what every one would allow to be reasonable in a father; except, indeed," added the poor sage, trying hard to be sprightly, and catching hold of a proverb to help him —"except, indeed, those wise enough to recollect that admonitory saying, 'Casa il figlio quando vuoi, e la figlia quando puoi,'—(Marry your son when you will, your daughter when you can). Seriously, if I overlook those objections to Mr Leslie, it is not natural for a young girl to enforce them. What is reason in you is quite another thing from reason in me. Mr Leslie is young, not ill-looking, has the air of a gentleman, is passionately enamoured of you, and has proved his affection by risking his life against that villanous Peschiera—that is, he would have risked it had Peschiera not been shipped out of the way. If, then, you will listen to reason, pray what can reason say against Mr Leslie?"

"Father, I detest him!"

"*Cospetto!*" persisted Riccabocca, testily, "you have no reason to detest him. If you had any reason, child, I am sure that I should be the last person to dispute it. How can you know your own mind in such a matter? It is not as if you had seen any one else you could prefer. Not another man of your own years do you even know—except, indeed, Leonard Fairfield, whom, though I grant he is handsomer, and with more imagination and genius than Mr Leslie, you still must remember as the boy who worked in my garden. Ah!

to be sure, there is Frank Hazeldean—fine lad—but his affections are pre-engaged. In short," continued the sage, dogmatically, "there is no one else you *can*, by any possible caprice, prefer to Mr Leslie; and for a girl, who has no one else in her head, to talk of detesting a well-looking, well-dressed, clever young man, is a nonsense, 'chi lascia il poco per haver l'assai nè l'uno, nè l'altro avera mai;'—which may be thus paraphrased—The young lady who refuses a mortal in the hope of obtaining an angel, loses the one, and will never fall in with the other. So now, having thus shown that the darker side of the question is contrary to reason—let us look to the brighter. In the first place——"

"Oh, father, father!" cried Violante, passionately, "you to whom I once came for comfort in every childish sorrow! Do not talk to me with this cutting levity. See, I lay my head upon your breast—I put my arms around you—and now, can you reason me into misery?"

"Child, child, do not be so wayward. Strive, at least, against a prejudice that you cannot defend. My Violante, my darling, this is no trifle. Here I must cease to be the fond foolish father whom you can do what you will with. Here I am, Alphonso, Duke di Serrano; for here my honour as noble, and my word as man, are involved. I, then, but a helpless exile—no hope of fairer prospects before me—trembling like a coward at the wiles of my unscrupulous kinsman—grasping at all chances to save you from his snares—I myself offered your hand to Randal Leslie—offered, promised, pledged it;—and now that my fortunes seem assured, my rank

in all likelihood restored, my foe crushed, my fears at rest—now, does it become me to retract what I myself had urged? It is not the noble, it is the parvenu, who has only to grow rich, in order to forget those whom in poverty he hailed as his friends.* Is it for me to make the poor excuse, never heard on the lips of an Italian Prince, 'that I cannot command the obedience of my child,'—subject myself to the galling answer—'Duke of Serrano, you could once command that obedience, when, in exile, penury, and terror, you offered me a bride without a dower.' Child—Violante—daughter of ancestors on whose honour never slander set a stain, I call on you to redeem your father's plighted word."

"Father, must it be so? Is not even the convent open to me? Nay, look not so coldly on me. If you could but read my heart! And, oh! I feel so assured of your own repentance hereafter—so assured that this man is not what you believe him. I so suspect that he has been playing throughout some secret and perfidious part."

"Ha!" interrupted Riccabocca, "Harley has perhaps infected you with that notion."

"No—no. But is not Harley—is not Lord L'Estrange one whose opinion you have cause to esteem? And if he distrust Mr Leslie——"

"Let him make good his distrust by such proof as will absolve my word, and I shall share your own joy. I

* "Quando 'l villano è divenuto ricco,
Non ha (*i. e.*, riconosce) parent' nè amico."
Italian Proverb.

have told him this. I have invited him to make good his suspicions—he puts me off. He cannot do so," added Riccabocca, in a dejected tone; "Randal has already so well explained all that Harley deemed equivocal. Violante, my name and my honour rest in your hands. Cast them away if you will; I cannot constrain you, and I cannot stoop to implore. *Noblesse oblige*—With your birth you took its duties. Let them decide between your vain caprice and your father's solemn remonstrance."

Assuming a sternness that he was far from feeling, and putting aside his daughter's arms, the exile walked away.

Violante paused a moment, shivered, looked round as if taking a last farewell of joy, and peace, and hope on earth, and then, approaching her father with a firm step, she said,—"I never rebelled, father; I did but entreat. What you say is my law now, as it has ever been; and come what may, never shall you hear complaint or murmur from me. Poor father, you will suffer more than I shall. Kiss me!"

About an hour afterwards, as the short day closed in, Harley, returning from his solitary wanderings, after he had parted from Helen, encountered on the terrace, before the house, Lady Lansmere and Audley Egerton arm in arm.

Harley had drawn his hat over his brows, and his eyes were fixed on the ground, so that he did not see the group upon which he came unawares, until Audley's voice started him from his reverie.

"My dear Harley," said the ex-minister, with a faint smile, "you must not pass us by, now that you have a moment of leisure from the cares of the election. And, Harley, though we are under the same roof, I see you so little." Lord L'Estrange darted a quick glance towards his mother—a glance that seemed to say, "You leaning on Audley's arm! Have you kept your promise?" And the eye that met his own reassured him.

"It is true," said Harley: "but you, who know that, once engaged in public affairs, one has no heart left for the ties of private life, will excuse me. And this election is so important!"

"And you, Mr Egerton," said Lady Lansmere, "whom the election most concerns, seem privileged to be the only one who appears indifferent to success."

"Ay—but you are not indifferent?" said Lord L'Estrange, abruptly.

"No. How can I be so, when my whole future career may depend on it?"

Harley drew Egerton aside. "There is one voter you ought at least to call upon and thank. He cannot be made to comprehend that, for the sake of any relation, even for the sake of his own son, he is to vote against the Blues—against you; I mean, of course, Nora's father, John Avenel. His vote and his son-in-law's gained your majority at your first election."

EGERTON.—"Call on John Avenel! Have *you* called?"

HARLEY (calmly).—"Yes. Poor old man, his mind has been affected ever since Nora's death. But your

name as the candidate for the borough at that time—the successful candidate for whose triumph the joy-bells chimed with her funeral knell—your name brings up her memory; and he talks in a breath of her and of you. Come, let us walk together to his house; it is close by the Park Lodge."

The drops stood on Audley's brow! He fixed his dark handsome eyes, in mournful amaze, upon Harley's tranquil face.

"Harley, at last, then, you have forgotten the Past."

"No; but the Present is more imperious. All my efforts are needed to requite your friendship. You stand against her brother—yet her father votes for you. And her mother says to her son, 'Let the old man alone. Conscience is all that is well alive in him; and he thinks if he were to vote against the Blues, he would sin against honour.' 'An electioneering prejudice,' some sceptics would say. But you must be touched by this trait of human nature—in *her* father, too—you, Audley Egerton, who are the soul of honour. What ails you?"

EGERTON.—"Nothing—a spasm at the heart—my old complaint. Well, I will call on the poor man later, but not now—not with you. Nay, nay, I will not—I cannot. Harley, just as you joined us, I was talking to your mother."

HARLEY.—"Ay, and what of?"

EGERTON.—"Yourself. I saw you from my windows walking with your betrothed. Afterwards, I observed her coming home alone; and by the glimpse I caught

of her gentle countenance, it seemed sad. Harley, do you deceive us?"

HARLEY.—"Deceive—I!—How!"

EGERTON.—"Do you really feel that your intended marriage will bestow on you the happiness, which is my prayer, as it must be your mother's?"

HARLEY.—"Happiness—I hoped so. But perhaps——"

EGERTON.—"Perhaps what?"

HARLEY.—"Perhaps the marriage may not take place. Perhaps I have a rival—not an open one—a secret, stealthy wooer—in one, too, whom I have loved, served, trusted. Question me not now. Such instances of treachery make one learn more how to prize a friendship honest, devoted, faithful, as your own, Audley Egerton. But here comes your *protégé*, released a while from his canvass, and your confidential adviser, Baron Levy. He accompanied Randal through the town to-day. So anxious is he to see that that young man does not play false, and regard his own interest before yours. Would that surprise you?"

EGERTON.—"You are too severe upon Randal Leslie. He is ambitious, worldly—has no surplus of affection at the command of his heart——"

HARLEY.—"Is it Randal Leslie you describe?"

EGERTON (with a languid smile).—"Yes, you see I do not flatter. But he is born and reared a gentleman; as such he would scarcely do anything mean. And, after all, it is with me that he must rise or fall. His very intellect must tell him that. But again I ask, do not

strive to prepossess me against him. I am a man who could have loved a son. I have none. Randal, such as he is, is a sort of son. He carries on my projects and my interest in the world of men beyond the goal of the tomb."

Audley turned kindly to Randal.

"Well, Leslie, what report of the canvass?"

"Levy has the book, sir. I think we have gained ten fresh votes for you, and perhaps seven for me."

"Let me rid you of your book, Baron Levy," said Harley.

Just at this time Riccabocca and Violante approached the house, both silent. The Italian caught sight of Randal, and made him a sign to join them. The young lover glanced fearfully towards Harley, and then with alacrity bounded forward, and was soon at Violante's side. But scarce had Harley, surprised by Leslie's sudden disappearance, remarked the cause, than with equal abruptness he abandoned the whispered conference he had commenced with Levy, and hastening to Randal, laid hand on the young man's shoulder, exclaiming, "Ten thousand pardons to all three! But I cannot allow this waste of time, Mr Leslie. You have yet an hour before it grows dark. There are three outvoters six miles off, influential farmers, whom you must canvass in person with my father's steward. Hasten to the stables; choose your own horse. To saddle—to saddle! Baron Levy, go and order my lord's steward, Mr Smart, to join Mr Leslie at the stables; then come back to me—quick. What!—loiter-

ing still, Mr Leslie! You will make me throw up your whole cause in disgust at your indolence and apathy."

Alarmed at this threat, Randal lifted his accusing eyes to Heaven, and withdrew.

Meanwhile Audley had drawn close to Lady Lansmere, who was leaning in thought over the balustrade of the terrace.

"Do you note," said Audley, whispering, "how Harley sprang forward when the fair Italian came in sight? Trust me, I was right. I know little of the young lady, but I have conversed with her. I have gazed on the changes in her face. If Harley ever love again, and if ever love influence and exalt his mind, wish with me that his choice may yet fall where I believe that his heart inclines it."

LADY LANSMERE.—"Ah! that it were so. Helen, I own, is charming; but—but—Violante is equal in birth! Are you not aware that she is engaged to your young friend Mr Leslie?"

AUDLEY.—"Randal told me so; but I cannot believe it. In fact, I have taken occasion to sound that fair creature's inclinations, and if I know aught of women her heart is not with Randal. I cannot believe her to be one whose affections are so weak as to be easily constrained; nor can I suppose that her father could desire to enforce a marriage that is almost a *mésalliance*. Randal must deceive himself; and from something Harley just let fall, in our painful but brief conversa-

tion, I suspect that his engagement with Miss Digby is broken off. He promises to tell me more, later. Yes," continued Audley, mournfully, "observe Violante's countenance, with its ever-varying play; listen to her voice, to which feeling seems to give the expressive music, and tell me whether you are not sometimes reminded of—of—in one word, there is one who, even without rank or fortune, would be worthy to replace the image of Leonora, and be to Harley—what Leonora could not; for sure I am that Violante loves him."

Harley, meanwhile, had lingered with Riccabocca and Violante, speaking but on indifferent subjects, obtaining short answers from the first, and none from the last, when the sage drew him a little aside, and whispered, "She has consented to sacrifice herself to my sense of honour. But, O Harley! if she be unhappy, it will break my heart. Either you must give me sufficient proof of Randal's unworthiness, to absolve me from my promise, or I must again entreat you to try and conciliate the poor child in his favour. All you say has weight with her; she respects you as—a second father."

Harley did not seem peculiarly flattered by that last assurance, but he was relieved from an immediate answer by the appearance of a man who came from the direction of the stables, and whose dress, covered with dust, and travel-stained, seemed like that of a foreign courier. No sooner did Harley catch sight of this person, than he sprang forward, and accosted him briefly and rapidly.

"You have been quick; I did not expect you so soon. You discovered the trace? You gave my letter?"

"And have brought back the answer, my lord," replied the man, taking the letter from a leathern pouch at his side. Harley hastily broke open the seal, and glanced over the contents, which were comprised in a few lines.

"Good. Say not whence you came. Do not wait here; return at once to London."

Harley's face seemed so unusually cheerful, as he rejoined the Italians, that the Duke exclaimed—

"A despatch from Vienna! My recall!"

"From Vienna, my dear friend? Not possible yet. I cannot calculate on hearing from the Prince till a day or two before the close of this election. But you wish me to speak to Violante. Join my mother yonder. What can she be saying to Mr Egerton? I will address a few words apart to your fair daughter, that may at least prove the interest in her fate taken by—her second father."

"Kindest of friends," said the unsuspecting pupil of Machiavelli; and he walked towards the terrace. Violante was about to follow. Harley detained her.

"Do not go till you have thanked me; for you are not the noble Violante for whom I take you, unless you acknowledge gratitude to any one who delivers you from the presence of an admirer in Mr Randal Leslie."

VIOLANTE.—"Ought I to hear this of one whom—whom——"

HARLEY.—"One whom your father obstinately persists in obtruding on your repugnance. Yet, O dear child, you who, when almost an infant, ere yet you knew what snares and pitfalls, for all who trust to another, lie under the sward at our feet, even when decked the fairest with the flowers of spring,—you who put your small hands around my neck, and murmured in your musical voice, 'Save us—save my father;' you, at least, I will not forsake, in a peril worse than that which menaced you then,—a peril which affrights you more than that which threatened you in the snares of Peschiera. Randal Leslie may thrive in his meaner objects of ambition—those I fling to him in scorn—but *you!*—the presuming varlet!" Harley paused a moment, half-stifled with indignation. He then resumed, calmly—"Trust to me, and fear not. I will rescue this hand from the profanation of Randal Leslie's touch; and then farewell, for life, to every soft emotion. Before me expands the welcome solitude. The innocent saved, the honest righted, the perfidious stricken by a just retribution—and then—what then? Why, at least I shall have studied Machiavelli with more effect than your wise father; and I shall lay him aside, needing no philosophy to teach me never again to be deceived." His brow darkened; he turned abruptly away, leaving Violante lost in amaze, fear—and a delight, vague, yet more vividly felt than all.

CHAPTER XXI.

THAT night, after the labours of the day, Randal had gained the sanctuary of his own room, and seated himself at his table, to prepare the heads of the critical speech he would have now very soon to deliver on the day of nomination—critical speech, when, in the presence of foes and friends, reporters from London, and amidst all the jarring interests that he sought to weave into the sole self-interest of Randal Leslie, he would be called upon to make the formal exposition of his political opinions. Randal Leslie, indeed, was not one of those speakers whom either modesty, fastidiousness, or conscientious desire of truth predisposes towards the labour of written composition. He had too much cleverness to be in want of fluent period, or ready commonplace—the ordinary materials of oratorical impromptu; too little taste for the Beautiful, to study what graces of diction will best adorn a noble sentiment; too obtuse a conscience, to care if the popular argument were purified from the dross which the careless flow of a speech wholly extemporaneous rarely fails to leave around it. But this was no ordinary occasion. Elaborate study here was requisite, not

for the orator, but the hypocrite. Hard task, to please the Blues, and not offend the Yellows,—appear to side with Audley Egerton, yet insinuate sympathy with Dick Avenel,—confront, with polite smile, the younger opponent, whose words had lodged arrows in his vanity, which rankled the more gallingly because they had raised the skin of his conscience.

He had dipped his pen into the ink, and smoothed the paper before him, when a knock was heard at the door.

"Come in," said he, impatiently. Levy entered, saunteringly.

"I am come to talk over matters with you, *mon cher*," said the Baron, throwing himself on the sofa. "And, first, I wish you joy of your prospects of success."

Randal postponed his meditated composition with a quick sigh, drew his chair towards the sofa, and lowered his voice into a whisper. "You think with me, that the chance of my success—is good?"

"Chance!—Why, it is a rubber of whist, in which your partner gives you all the winnings, and in which the adversary is almost sure to revoke. Either Avenel or his nephew, it is true, must come in; but not both. Two parvenus aspiring to make a family seat of an Earl's borough! Bah! too absurd."

"I hear from Riccabocca (or rather the Duke di Serrano) that this same young Fairfield is greatly indebted to the kindness of Lord L'Estrange. Very odd that he should stand against the Lansmere interest."

"Ambition, *mon cher*. You yourself are under some obligations to Mr Egerton. Yet, in reality, he has more to apprehend from you than from Mr Fairfield."

"I disown obligations to Mr Egerton. And if the electors prefer me to him (whom, by the by, they once burned in effigy), it is no fault of mine: the fault, if any, will rest with his own dearest friend, L'Estrange. I do not understand how a man of such clear sense as L'Estrange undoubtedly possesses, should be risking Egerton's election in his zeal for mine. Nor do his formal courtesies to myself deceive me. He has even implied that he suspects me of connivance with Peschiera's schemes on Violante. But those suspicions he cannot support. For of course, Levy, you would not betray me?"

"I! What possible interest could I serve in that?"

"None that I can discover, certainly," said Randal, relaxing into a smile. "And when I get into Parliament, aided by the social position which my marriage will give me, I shall have so many ways to serve you. No, it is certainly your interest not to betray me. And I shall count on you as a witness, if a witness can be required."

"Count on me, certainly, my dear fellow," said the Baron. "And I suppose there will be no witness the other way. Done for eternally is my poor friend Peschiera, whose cigars, by the by, were matchless;—I wonder if there will be any for sale. And if he were not so done for, it is not you, it is L'Estrange, that he would be tempted to do for."

"We may blot Peschiera out of the map of the future," rejoined Randal. "Men from whom henceforth we have nothing to hope or to fear, are to us as the races before the Deluge."

"Fine remark," quoth the Baron, admiringly. "Peschiera, though not without brains, was a complete failure. And when the failure of one I have tried to serve is complete, the rule I have adopted through life is to give him up altogether."

"Of course," said Randal.

"Of course," echoed the Baron. "On the other hand, you know that I like pushing forward young men of mark and promise. You really are amazingly clever; but how comes it you don't speak better? Do you know I doubt whether you will do in the House of Commons all that I expected from your address and readiness in private life."

"Because I cannot talk trash vulgar enough for a mob? Pooh! I shall succeed wherever knowledge is really power. Besides, you must allow for my infernal position. You know, after all, that Avenel, if he can only return himself or his nephew, still holds in his hands the choice of the candidate upon our side. I cannot attack him—I cannot attack his insolent nephew."

"Insolent!—not that, but bitterly eloquent. He hits you hard. You are no match for him, Randal, before a popular audience; though *en petite comité*, the devil himself were hardly a match for *you*. But now to a somewhat more serious point. Your election you will win—your bride is promised to you; but the

old Leslie lands, in the present possession of Squire Thornhill, you have not gained—and your chance of gaining them is in great jeopardy. I did not like to tell you this morning—it would have spoiled your temper for canvassing; but I have received a letter from Thornhill himself. He has had an offer for the property, which is only £1000 short of what he asks. A city alderman, called Jobson, is the bidder; a man it seems of large means and few words. The alderman has fixed the date on which he must have a definite answer; and that date falls on the —th, two days after that fixed for the poll at Lansmere. The brute declares he will close with another investment, if Thornhill does not then come into his terms. Now, as Thornhill will accept these terms unless I can positively promise him better, and as those funds on which you calculated (had the marriage of Peschiera with Violante, and Frank Hazeldean with Madame di Negra, taken place) fail you, I see no hope for your being in time with the money—and the old lands of the Leslies must yield their rents to a Jobson."

"I care for nothing on earth like those old lands of my forefathers," said Randal, with unusual vehemence —"I reverence so little amongst the living—and I do reverence the dead. And my marriage will take place so soon; and the dower would so amply cover the paltry advance required."

"Yes; but the mere prospect of a marriage to the daughter of a man whose lands are still sequestered, would be no security to a money-lender."

"Surely," said Randal, "you who once offered to assist me when my fortunes were more precarious, might now accommodate me with this loan, as a friend, and keep the title-deeds of the estate as——"

"As a money-lender," added the Baron, laughing pleasantly. "No, *mon cher*, I will still lend you half the sum required in advance, but the other half is more than I can afford as friend, or hazard as money-lender; and it would damage my character—be out of all rule—if, the estates falling, by your default of payment, into my own hands, I should appear to be the real purchaser of the property of my own distressed client. But, now I think of it, did not Squire Hazeldean promise you his assistance in this matter?"

"He did so," answered Randal, "as soon as the marriage between Frank and Madame di Negra was off his mind. I meant to cross over to Hazeldean immediately after the election. How can I leave the place till then?"

"If you do, your election is lost. But why not write to the Squire?"

"It is against my maxim to write where I can speak. However, there is no option; I will write at once. Meanwhile, communicate with Thornhill; keep up his hopes; and be sure, at least, that he does not close with this greedy alderman before the day fixed for decision."

"I have done all that already, and my letter is gone. Now, do your part: and if you write as cleverly as you talk, you would coax the money out from a stonier

heart than poor Mr Hazeldean's. I leave you now—Good-night."

Levy took up his candlestick, nodded, yawned, and went.

Randal still suspended the completion of his speech, and indited the following epistle :—

"My dear Mr Hazeldean,—I wrote to you a few hasty lines on leaving town, to inform you that the match you so dreaded was broken off, and proposing to defer particulars till I could visit your kind and hospitable roof, which I trusted to do for a few hours during my stay at Lansmere, since it is not a day's journey hence to Hazeldean. But I did not calculate on finding so sharp a contest. In no election throughout the kingdom do I believe that a more notable triumph, or a more stunning defeat, for the great landed interest can occur. For in this town—so dependent on agriculture—we are opposed by a low and sordid manufacturer, of the most revolutionary notions, who has, moreover, the audacity to force his own nephew—that very boy whom I chastised for impertinence on your village green—son of a common carpenter—actually the audacity, I say, to attempt to force this peasant of a nephew, as well as himself, into the representation of Lansmere, against the Earl's interest, against your distinguished brother—of myself I say nothing. You should hear the language in which these two men indulge against all your family ! If we are beaten by such persons in a borough supposed to be so loyal as Lansmere, every

one with a stake in the country may tremble at such a prognostic of the ruin that must await not only our old English Constitution, but the existence of property itself. I need not say that on such an occasion I cannot spare myself. Mr Egerton is ill too. All the fatigue of the canvass devolves on me. I feel, my dear and revered friend, that I am a genuine Hazeldean, fighting your battle; and that thought carries me through all. I cannot, therefore, come to you till the election is over; and meanwhile you, and my dear Mrs Hazeldean, must be anxious to know more about the affair that so preyed on both your hearts, than I have yet informed you, or can well trust to a letter. Be assured, however, that the worst is over; the lady has gone abroad. I earnestly entreated Frank (who showed me Mrs Hazeldean's most pathetic letter to him), to hasten at once to the Hall and relieve your minds. Unfortunately he would not be ruled by me, but talked of going abroad too—not, I trust (nay, I feel assured), in pursuit of Madame di Negra; but still—in short, I should be so glad to see you, and talk over the whole. Could you not come hither?—pray do. And now, at the risk of your thinking that in this I am only consulting my own interest (but no—your noble English heart will never so misjudge me!), I will add with homely frankness, that if you could accommodate me immediately with the loan you not long since so generously offered, you would save those lands once in my family from passing away from us for ever. A city alderman—one Jobson—is meanly taking advantage of

Thornhill's necessities, and driving a hard bargain for those lands. He has fixed the —th inst. for Thornhill's answer, and Levy (who is here assisting Mr Egerton's election) informs me that Thornhill will accept his offer, unless I am provided with £10,000 beforehand; the other £10,000, to complete the advance required, Levy will lend me. Do not be surprised at the usurer's liberality; he knows that I am about shortly to marry a very great heiress (you will be pleased when you learn whom, and will then be able to account for my indifference to Miss Sticktorights), and her dower will amply serve to repay his loan and your own, if I may trust to your generous affection for the grandson of a Hazeldean! I have the less scruple in this appeal to you, for I know how it would grieve you that a Jobson, who perhaps never knew a grandmother, should foist your own kinsman from the lands of his fathers. Of one thing I am convinced—we squires, and sons of squires, must make common cause against those great monied capitalists, or they will buy us all out in a few generations. The old race of country gentlemen is already much diminished by the grasping cupidity of such leviathans; and if the race be once extinct, what will become of the boast and strength of England!

"Yours, my dear Mr Hazeldean, with most affectionate and grateful respect,

"RANDAL LESLIE."

CHAPTER XXII.

NOTHING to Leonard could as yet be more distasteful or oppressive than his share in this memorable election. In the first place, it chafed the secret sores of his heart to be compelled to resume the name of Fairfield, which was a tacit disavowal of his birth. It had been such delight to him that the same letters which formed the name of Nora should weave also that name of Oran, to which he had given distinction, which he had associated with all his nobler toils, and all his hopes of enduring fame—a mystic link between his own career and his mother's obscurer genius. It seemed to him as if it were rendering to her the honours accorded to himself —subtle and delicate fancy of the affections, of which only poets would be capable, but which others than poets may perhaps comprehend! That earlier name of Fairfield was connected in his memory with all the ruder employments, the meaner trials of his boyhood; —the name of Oran, with poetry and fame. It was his title in the ideal world, amongst all fair shapes and spirits. In receiving the old appellation, the practical world, with its bitterness and strife, returned to him as at the utterance of a spell. But in coming to Lansmere he had no choice. To say nothing of Dick, and Dick's

parents, with whom his secret would not be safe, Randal Leslie knew that he had gone by the name of Fairfield —knew his supposed parentage, and would be sure to proclaim them. How account for the later name without setting curiosity to decipher the anagram it involved, and perhaps guiding suspicion to his birth from Nora, to the injury of her memory, yet preserved from stain?

His feelings as connected with Nora—sharpened and deepened as they all had been by his discovery of her painful narrative—were embittered still more by coming in contact with her parents. Old John was in the same helpless state of mind and body as before—neither worse nor better; but waking up at intervals with vivid gleams of interest in the election at the wave of a blue banner—at the cry of "Blue for ever!" It was the old broken-down charger, who, dozing in the meadows, starts at the roll of the drum. No persuasions Dick could employ would induce his father to promise to vote even one Yellow. You might as well have expected the old Roman, with his monomaniac cry against Carthage, to have voted for choosing Carthaginians for consuls. But poor John, nevertheless, was not only very civil, but very humble to Dick—"very happy to oblige the gentleman."

"Your own son!" bawled Dick; "and here is your own grandson."

"Very happy to serve you both; but you see you are the wrong colour."

Then as he gazed at Leonard, the old man approached

him with trembling knees, stroked his hair, looked into his face piteously. "Be thee my grandson?" he faltered. "Wife, wife, Nora had no son, had she? My memory begins to fail me, sir; pray excuse it; but you have a look about the eyes that——" Old John began to weep, and his wife led him away.

"Don't come again," she said to Leonard, harshly, when she returned. "He'll not sleep all night now." And then, observing that the tears stood in Leonard's eyes, she added, in softened tones—"I am glad to see you well and thriving, and to hear that you have been of great service to my son Richard, who is a credit and an honour to the family, though poor John cannot vote for him or for you against his conscience; and he should not be asked," she added, firing up; "and it is a sin to ask it, and he so old, and no one to defend him but me. But defend him I will while I have life!"

The poet recognised woman's brave, loving, wife-like heart here, and would have embraced the stern grandmother, if she had not drawn back from him; and, as she turned towards the room to which she had led her husband, she said over her shoulder—

"I'm not so unkind as I seem, boy; but it is better for you, and for all, that you should not come to this house again—better that you had not come into the town."

"Fie, mother!" said Dick, seeing that Leonard, bending his head, silently walked from the room. "You should be prouder of your grandson than you are of me."

"Prouder of him who may shame us all yet?"

"What do you mean?"

But Mrs Avenel shook her head and vanished.

"Never mind her, poor old soul," said Dick, as he joined Leonard at the threshold; "she always had her tempers. And since there is no vote to be got in this house, and one can't set a caucus on one's own father —at least in this extraordinarily rotten and prejudiced old country, which is quite in its dotage—we'll not come here to be snubbed any more. Bless their old hearts nevertheless!"

Leonard's acute sensibility in all that concerned his birth, deeply wounded by Mrs Avenel's allusions, which he comprehended better than his uncle did, was also kept on the edge by the suspense to which he was condemned by Harley's continued silence as to the papers confided to that nobleman. It seemed to Leonard almost unaccountable that Harley should have read those papers—be in the same town with himself—and yet volunteer no communication. At length he wrote a few lines to Lord L'Estrange, bringing the matter that concerned him so deeply before Harley's recollection, and suggesting his own earnest interest in any information that could supply the gaps and omissions of the desultory fragments. Harley, in replying to this note, said, with apparent reason, "that it would require a long personal interview to discuss the subject referred to, and that such an interview, in the thick of the contest between himself and a candidate opposed to the Lansmere

party would be sure to get wind, be ascribed to political intrigues, be impossible otherwise to explain—and embarrass all the interests confided to their respective charge. That for the rest he had not been unmindful of Leonard's anxiety, which must now mainly be to see justice done to the dead parent, and learn the name, station, and character of the parent yet surviving. And in this Harley trusted to assist him as soon as the close of the poll would present a suitable occasion." The letter was unlike Harley's former cordial tone: it was hard and dry. Leonard respected L'Estrange too much to own to himself that it was unfeeling. With all his rich generosity of nature, he sought excuses for what he declined to blame. Perhaps something in Helen's manner or words had led Harley to suspect that she still cherished too tender an interest in the companion of her childhood; perhaps under this coldness of expression there lurked the burning anguish of jealousy. And, oh Leonard so well understood, and could so nobly compassionate, even in his prosperous rival, that torture of the most agonising of human passions, in which all our reasonings follow the distorted writhings of our pain.

And Leonard himself, amidst his other causes of disquiet, was at once so gnawed and so humbled by his own jealousy. Helen, he knew, was still under the same roof as Harley. They, the betrothed, could see each other daily, hourly. He would soon hear of their marriage. She would be borne afar from the very sphere of his existence—carried into a loftier region—

accessible only to his dreams. And yet to be jealous of one to whom both Helen and himself were under such obligations, debased him in his own esteem—jealousy here was so like ingratitude. But for Harley, what could have become of Helen, left to his boyish charge?—he who had himself been compelled, in despair, to think of sending her from his side, to be reared into smileless youth in his mother's humble cottage, while he faced famine alone, gazing on the terrible river, from the bridge by which he had once begged for very alms—begged of that Audley Egerton, to whom he was now opposed as an equal;—or flying from the fiend that glared at him under the lids of the haunting Chatterton. No, jealousy here was more than agony—it was degradation—it was crime! But, ah! if Helen were happy in these splendid nuptials! Was he sure even of that consolation? Bitter was the thought either way—that she should wholly forget him, in happiness from which he stood excluded as a thing of sin—or sinfully herself remember, and be wretched!

With that healthful strength of will which is more often proportioned to the susceptibility of feeling than the world suppose, the young man at last wrenched himself for a while from the iron that had entered into his soul, and forced his thoughts to seek relief in the very objects from which they otherwise would have the most loathingly recoiled. He aroused his imagination to befriend his reason; he strove to divine some motive not explained by Harley, not to be referred to the mere defeat, by counter-scheme, of the scheming Randal—nor

even to be solved, by any service to Audley Egerton, which Harley might evolve from the complicated meshes of the election;—some motive that could more interest his own heart in the contest, and connect itself with Harley's promised aid in clearing up the mystery of his parentage. Nora's memoir had clearly hinted that his father was of rank and station far beyond her own. She had thrown the glow of her glorious fancies over the ambition and the destined career of the lover in whom she had merged her ambition as poetess, and her career as woman. Possibly the father might be more disposed to own and to welcome the son, if the son could achieve an opening, and give promise of worth, in that grand world of public life in which alone reputation takes precedence of rank. Possibly, too, if the son thus succeeded, and became one whom a proud father could with pride acknowledge, possibly he might not only secure a father's welcome, but vindicate a mother's name. This marriage, which Nora darkly hinted she had been led to believe was fraudulent, might, after all, have been legal—the ceremony concealed, even till now, by worldly shame at disparity of rank. But if the son could make good his own footing—there where rank itself owned its chiefs in talent—that shame might vanish. These suppositions were not improbable; nor were they uncongenial to Leonard's experience of Harley's delicate benignity of purpose. Here, too, the image of Helen allied itself with those of his parents, to support his courage and influence his new ambition. True, that she was lost to him for ever. No worldly

success, no political honours, could now restore her to his side. But she might hear him named with respect in those circles in which alone she would hereafter move, and in which parliamentary reputation ranks higher than literary fame. And perhaps in future years, when love, retaining its tenderness, was purified from its passion, they might thus meet as friends. He might, without a pang, take her children on his knees, and say, perhaps in their old age, when he had climed to a social equality even with her high-born lord, "It was the hope to regain the privilege bestowed on our childhood, that strengthened me to seek distinction when you and happiness forsook my youth." Thus regarded, the election, which had before seemed to him so poor and vulgar an exhibition of vehement passions for petty objects, with its trumpery of banners, and its discord of trumpets, suddenly grew into vivid interest, and assumed dignity and importance. It is ever thus with all mortal strife. In proportion as it possesses, or is void of, the diviner something that quickens the pulse of the heart, and elevates the wing of the imagination, it presents a mockery to the philosopher, or an inspiration to the bard. Feel *that something*, and no contest is mean! Feel it not, and, like Byron, you may class with the slaughter of Cannæ that field which, at Waterloo, restored the landmarks of nations; or may jeer with Juvenal at the dust of Hannibal, because he sought to deliver Carthage from ruin, and free a world from Rome.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ONCE, then, grappling manfully with the task he had undertaken, and constraining himself to look on what Riccabocca would have called "the southern side of things," whatever there was really great in principle or honourable to human nature, deep below the sordid details and pitiful interests apparent on the face of the agitated current, came clear to his vision. The ardour of those around him began to be contagious; the generous devotion to some cause, apart from self, which pervades an election, and to which the poorest voter will often render sacrifices that may be called sublime —the warm personal affection which community of zeal creates for the defender of beloved opinions—all concurred to dispel that indifference to party politics, and counteract that disgust of their baser leaven, which the young poet had first conceived. He even began to look with complacency, for itself, on a career of toil and honours strange to his habitual labours and intellectual ambition. He threw the poetry of idea within him (as poets ever do) into the prose of action to which he was hurried forward. He no longer opposed Dick Avenel when that gentleman represented how detri-

mental it would be to his business at Screwstown if he devoted to his country the time and the acumen required by his mill and its steam-engine; and how desirable it would be, on all accounts, that Leonard Fairfield should become the parliamentary representative of the Avenels. "If, therefore," said Dick, "two of us cannot come in, and one must retire, leave it to me to arrange with the committee that you shall be the one to persist. Oh, never fear but what all scruples of honour shall be satisfied. I would not, for the sake of the Avenels, have a word said against their representative."

"But," answered Leonard, "if I grant this, I fear that you have some intention of suffering the votes that your resignation would release, to favour Leslie at the expense of Egerton."

"What the deuce is Egerton to you?"

"Nothing, except through my gratitude to his friend Lord L'Estrange."

"Pooh! I will tell you a secret. Levy informs me privately that L'Estrange will be well satisfied if the choice of Lansmere fall upon Leslie instead of Egerton; and I think I convinced my Lord—for I saw him in London—that Egerton would have no chance, though Leslie might."

"I must think that Lord L'Estrange would resist to the utmost any attempt to prefer Leslie—whom he despises—to Egerton, whom he honours. And, so thinking, I too would resist it, as you may judge by the speeches which have so provoked your displeasure."

"Let us cut short a yarn of talk which, when it comes to likings and dislikings, might last to almighty crack: I'll ask you to do nothing that Lord L'Estrange does not sanction. Will that satisfy you?"

"Certainly, provided I am assured of the sanction."

And now, the important day preceding the poll, the day in which the candidates were to be formally nominated, and meet each other in all the ceremony of declared rivalship, dawned at last. The town-hall was the place selected for the occasion; and before sunrise, all the streets were resonant with music, and gay with banners.

Audley Egerton felt that he could not—without incurring some just sarcasm on his dread to face the constituency he had formerly represented, and by the malcontents of which he had been burned in effigy—absent himself from the town-hall, as he had done from balcony and hostel. Painful as it was to confront Nora's brother, and wrestle in public against all the secret memories that knit the strife of the present contest with the anguish that recalled the first—still the thing must be done; and it was the English habit of his life to face with courage whatever he had to do.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE chiefs of the Blue party went in state from Lansmere Park; the two candidates in open carriages, each attended with his proposer and seconder. Other carriages were devoted to Harley and Levy, and the principal members of the committee. Riccabocca was seized with a fit of melancholy or cynicism, and declined to join the procession. But just before they started, as all were assembling without the front door, the postman arrived with his welcome bag. There were letters for Harley, some for Levy, many for Egerton, one for Randal Leslie.

Levy, soon hurrying over his own correspondence, looked, in the familiar freedom wherewith he usually treated his particular friends, over Randal's shoulder.

"From the Squire?" said he. "Ah, he has written at last! What made him delay so long? Hope he relieves your mind?"

"Yes," cried Randal, giving way to a joy that rarely lighted up his close and secret countenance—"yes, he does not write from Hazeldean—not there when my letter arrived—in London—could not rest at the Hall—the place reminded him too much of Frank—went again to town, on the receipt of my first letter concern-

ing the rupture of the marriage, to see after his son, and take up some money to pay off his *post-obit*. Read what he says :—'So, while I was about a mortgage—(never did I guess that I should be the man to encumber the Hazeldean estate)—I thought I might as well add £20,000 as £10,000 to the total. Why should you be indebted at all to that Baron Levy? Don't have dealings with money-lenders. Your grandmother was a Hazeldean; and from a Hazeldean you shall have the whole sum required in advance for those Rood lands—good light soil some of them. As to repayment, we'll talk of that later. If Frank and I come together again, as we did of old, why, my estates will be his some day; and he'll not grudge the mortgage, so fond as he always was of you; and if we don't come together, what do I care for hundreds or thousands, either more or less? So I shall be down at Lansmere the day after to-morrow, just in the thick of your polling. Beat the manufacturer, my boy, and stick up for the land. Tell Levy to have all ready. I shall bring the money down in good bank-notes, and a brace of pistols in my coat-pocket to take care of them, in case robbers get scent of the notes and attack me on the road, as they did my grandfather sixty years ago come next Michaelmas. A Lansmere election puts one in mind of pistols. I once fought a duel with an officer in his Majesty's service, R.N., and had a ball lodged in my right shoulder, on account of an election at Lansmere; but I have forgiven Audley his share in that transaction. Remember me to him kindly. Don't get into a duel yourself; but I

suppose manufacturers don't fight;—not that I blame them for that—far from it.'"

The letter then ran on to express surprise, and hazard conjecture, as to the wealthy marriage which Randal had announced as a pleasing surprise to the Squire.

"Well," said Levy, returning the letter, "you *must* have written as cleverly as you talk, or the Squire is a booby indeed."

Randal smiled, pocketed his letter, and responding to the impatient call of his proposer, sprang lightly into the carriage.

Harley, too, seemed pleased with the letters delivered to himself, and now joined Levy, as the candidates drove slowly off.

"Has not Mr Leslie received from the Squire an answer to that letter of which you informed me?"

"Yes, my lord, the Squire will be here to-morrow."

"To-morrow? Thank you for apprising me; his rooms shall be prepared."

"I suppose he will only stay to see Leslie and myself, and pay the money."

"Aha! Pay the money. Is it so, then?"

"Twice the sum, and, it seems, as a gift, which Leslie only asked as a loan. Really, my lord, Mr Leslie is a very clever man; and though I am at your commands, I should not like to injure him. With such matrimonial prospects, he could be a very powerful enemy; and if he succeed in Parliament, still more so."

"Baron, these gentlemen are waiting for you. I will follow by myself."

CHAPTER XXV.

In the centre of the raised platform in the town-hall sat the Mayor. On either hand of that dignitary now appeared the candidates of the respective parties. To his right, Audley Egerton and Leslie; to his left, Dick Avenel and Leonard. The place was as full as it could hold. Rows of grimy faces peeped in, even from the upper windows outside the building. The contest was one that created intense interest, not only from public principles, but local passions. Dick Avenel, the son of a small tradesman, standing against the Right Honourable Audley Egerton, the choice of the powerful Lansmere aristocratic party—standing, too, with his nephew by his side—taking, as he himself was wont to say, "the tarnation Blue Bull by both its oligarchical horns!" There was a pluck and gallantry in the very impudence of the attempt to convert the important borough—for one member of which a great Earl had hitherto striven, "with labour dire and weary woe,"—into two family seats for the house of Avenel and the triumph of the Capelocracy.

This alone would have excited all the spare passions of a country borough; but, besides this, there was the

curiosity that attached to the long-deferred public appearance of a candidate so renowned as the ex-minister —a man whose career had commenced with his success at Lansmere, and who now, amidst the popular tempest that scattered his colleagues, sought to refit his vessel in the same harbour from which it had first put forth. New generations had grown up since the name of Audley Egerton had first fluttered the dovecotes in that Corioli. The questions that had then seemed so important, were, for the most part, settled and at rest. But those present who remembered Egerton in the former day, were struck to see how the same characteristics of bearing and aspect which had distinguished his early youth revived their interest in the mature and celebrated man. As he stood up for a few moments, before he took his seat beside the Mayor, glancing over the assembly, with its uproar of cheers and hisses, there was the same stately erectness of form and steadfastness of look—the same indefinable and mysterious dignity of externals, that imposed respect, confirmed esteem, or stilled dislike. The hisses involuntarily ceased.

The preliminary proceedings over, the proposers and seconders commenced their office.

Audley was proposed, of course, by the crack man of the party—a gentleman who lived on his means in a white house in the High Street—had received a University education, and was a cadet of a "County Family." This gentleman spoke much about the Constitution, something about Greece and Rome—compared Egerton with William Pitt, also with Aristides; and

sat down, after an oration esteemed classical by the few, and pronounced prosy by the many. Audley's seconder, a burly and important maltster, struck a bolder key. He dwelt largely upon the necessity of being represented by gentlemen of wealth and rank, and not by "upstarts and adventurers. (Cheers and groans.) Looking at the candidates on the other side, it was an insult to the respectability of Lansmere to suppose its constituents could elect a man who had no pretensions whatever to their notice, except that he had once been a little boy in the town, in which his father kept a shop—and a very noisy, turbulent, dirty little boy he was!" Dick smoothed his spotless shirt-front, and looked daggers, while the Blues laughed heartily, and the Yellows cried "Shame." "As for the other candidate on the same side, he (the maltster) had nothing to say against him. He was, no doubt, seduced into presumption by his uncle and his own inexperience. It was said that that candidate, Mr Fairfield, was an author and a poet; if so, he was unknown to fame, for no bookseller in the town had ever even heard of Mr Fairfield's works. Then it was replied, Mr Fairfield had written under another name. What would that prove? Either that he was ashamed of his name, or that the works did him no credit. For his part, he (the maltster) was an Englishman; he did not like anonymous scribblers; there was something not right in whatever was concealed. A man should never be afraid to put his name to what he wrote. But, grant that Mr Fairfield was a great author and a

great poet, what the borough of Lansmere wanted was, not a member who would pass his time in writing sonnets to Peggy or Moggy, but a practical man of business —a statesman—such a man as Mr Audley Egerton—a gentleman of ancient birth, high standing, and princely fortune. The member for such a place as Lansmere should have a proper degree of wealth." ("Hear, hear!" from the Hundred and Fifty Hesitators, who all stood in a row at the bottom of the hall; and "Gammon!" "Stuff!" from some revolutionary but incorruptible Yellows.) Still the allusion to Egerton's private fortune had considerable effect with the bulk of the audience, and the maltster was much cheered on concluding. Mr Avenel's proposer and seconder—the one a large grocer, the other the proprietor of a new shop for ticketed prints, shawls, blankets, and counterpanes (a man who, as he boasted, dealt with the People for ready money, and no mistake—at least none that *he* ever rectified), next followed. Both said much the same thing. Mr Avenel had made his fortune by honest industry—was a fellow-townsman—must know the interests of the town better than strangers—upright public principles—never fawn on governments—would see that the people had their rights, and cut down army, navy, and all other jobs of a corrupt aristocracy, &c. &c. &c. Randal Leslie's proposer, a captain on half-pay, undertook a long defence of army and navy, from the unpatriotic aspersions of the preceding speakers; which defence diverted him from the due praise of Randal, until cries of "Cut it short," recalled

him to that subject; and then the topics he selected for eulogium were "amiability of character, so conspicuous in the urbane manners of his young friend;"—"coincidence in the opinions of that illustrious statesman with whom he was conjoined;"—"early tuition in the best principles—only fault, youth—and that was a fault which would diminish every day." Randal's seconder was a bluff yeoman, an out-voter of weight with the agricultural electors. He was too straightforward by half—adverted to Audley Egerton's early desertion of questions espoused by the landed interest—"hoped he had had enough of the large towns; and he (the yeoman) was ready to forgive and forget, but trusted that there would be no chance of burning their member again in effigy. As to the young gentleman, whose nomination he had the pleasure to second—did not know much about him; but the Leslies were an old family in the neighbouring county, and Mr Leslie said he was nearly related to Squire Hazeldean—as good a man as ever stood upon shoe leather. He (the yeoman) liked a good breed in sheep and bullocks; and a good breed in men he supposed was the same thing. He (the yeoman) was not for abuses—he was for King and Constitution. He should have no objection, for instance, to have tithes lowered, and the malt-tax repealed—not the least objection. Mr Leslie seemed to him a likely young chap, and uncommon well-spoken; and, on the whole, for aught he (the yeoman) could see, would do quite as well in Parliament as nine-tenths of the

gentlemen sent there." The yeoman sat down, little cheered by the Blues—much by the Yellows—and with a dim consciousness that somehow or other he had rather damaged than not the cause of the party he had been chosen to advocate. Leonard was not particularly fortunate in his proposer—a youngish gentleman—who, having tried various callings, with signal unsuccess, had come into a small independence, and set up for a literary character. This gentleman undertook the defence of poets, as the half-pay captain had undertaken that of the army and navy; and after a dozen sentences spoken through the nose, about the "moonlight of existence," and "the oasis in the desert," suddenly broke down, to the satisfaction of his impatient listeners. This failure was, however, redeemed by Leonard's seconder—a master tailor—a practised speaker, and an earnest thinking man—sincerely liking, and warmly admiring, Leonard Fairfield. His opinions were delivered with brief simplicity, and accompanied by expressions of trust in Leonard's talents and honesty, that were effective, because expressed with feeling.

These preparatory orations over, a dead silence succeeded, and Audley Egerton arose.

At the first few sentences, all felt they were in the presence of one accustomed to command attention, and to give to opinions the weight of recognised authority. The slowness of the measured accents, the composure of the manly aspect, the decorum of the simple ges-

tures—all bespoke and all became the Minister of a great empire, who had less agitated assemblies by impassioned eloquence, than compelled their silent respect to the views of sagacity and experience. But what might have been formal and didactic in another, was relieved in Egerton by that air, tone, bearing of a *gentleman*, which have a charm for the most plebeian audience. He had eminently these attributes in private life; but they became far more conspicuous whenever he had to appear in public. The "*senatorius decor*" seemed a phrase coined for him.

Audley commenced with notice of his adversaries in that language of high courtesy which is so becoming to superior station, and which augurs better for victory than the most pointed diatribes of hostile declamation. Inclining his head towards Avenel, he expressed regret that he should be opposed by a gentleman whose birth naturally endeared him to the town of which he was a distinguished native, and whose honourable ambition was in itself a proof of the admirable nature of that Constitution, which admitted the lowliest to rise to its distinctions, while it compelled the loftiest to labour and compete for those honours which were the most coveted, because they were derived from the trust of their countrymen, and dignified by the duties which the sense of responsibility entailed. He paid a passing but generous compliment to the reputed abilities of Leonard Fairfield; and, alluding with appropriate grace to the interest he had ever taken in the success of youth striving for place in the van of the new generation that

marched on to replace the old, he implied that he did not consider Leonard as opposed to himself, but rather as an emulous competitor for a worthy prize with his "own young and valued friend, Mr Randal Leslie." "They are happy at their years!" said the statesman, with a certain pathos. "In the future they see nothing to fear, in the past they have nothing to defend. It is not so with me." And then passing on to the vague insinuations or bolder charges against himself and his policy proffered by the preceding speakers, Audley gathered himself up, and paused; for his eye here rested on the Reporters seated round the table just below him; and he recognised faces not unfamiliar to his recollection when metropolitan assemblies had hung on the words which fell from lips then privileged to advise a King. And involuntarily it occurred to the ex-minister to escape altogether from this contracted audience—this election, with all its associations of pain —and address himself wholly to that vast and invisible Public, to which those Reporters would transmit his ideas. At this thought his whole manner gradually changed. His eye became fixed on the farthest verge of the crowd; his tones grew more solemn in their deep and sonorous swell. He began to review and to vindicate his whole political life. He spoke of the measures he had aided to pass—of his part in the laws which now ruled the land. He touched lightly, but with pride, on the services he had rendered to the opinions he had represented. He alluded to his neglect of his own private fortunes; but in what detail, however

minute, in the public business committed to his charge, could even an enemy accuse him of neglect? The allusion was no doubt intended to prepare the public for the news, that the wealth of Audley Egerton was gone. Finally, he came to the questions that then agitated the day; and made a general but masterly exposition of the policy which, under the changes he foresaw, he should recommend his party to adopt.

Spoken to the motley assembly in that town-hall, Audley's speech extended to a circle of interests too wide for their sympathy. But that assembly he heeded not—he forgot it. The Reporters understood him, as their flying pens followed words which they presumed neither to correct nor to abridge. Audley's speech was addressed to the nation;—the speech of a man in whom the nation yet recognised a chief—desiring to clear all misrepresentation from his past career—calculating, if life were spared to him, on destinies higher than he had yet fulfilled—issuing a manifesto of principles to be carried later into power, and planting a banner round which the divided sections of a broken host might yet rally for battle and for conquest. Or perhaps, in the deeps of his heart (not even comprehended by reporters, nor to be divined by the public), the uncertainty of life was more felt than the hope of ambition; and the statesman desired to leave behind him one full vindication of that *public* integrity and honour, on which, at least, his conscience acknowledged not a stain. "For more than twenty years," said Audley, in conclusion, "I have known no day in which I have not lived for

my country. I may at times have opposed the wish of the People—I may oppose it now—but, so far as I can form a judgment, only because I prefer their welfare to their wish. And if—as I believe—there have been occasions on which, as one amongst men more renowned, I have amended the laws of England—confirmed her safety, extended her commerce, upheld her honour—I leave the rest to the censure of my enemies, and (his voice trembled) to the charity of my friends."

Before the cheers that greeted the close of this speech were over, Richard Avenel arose. What is called "the more respectable part" of an audience—viz., the better educated and better clad, even on the Yellow side of the question—winced a little for the credit of their native borough, when they contemplated the candidate pitted against the Great Commoner, whose lofty presence still filled the eye, and whose majestic tones yet sounded in the ear. But the vast majority on both sides, Blue and Yellow, hailed the rise of Dick Avenel as a relief to what, while it had awed their attention, had rather strained their faculties. The Yellows cheered and the Blues groaned; there was a tumultuous din of voices, and a reel to and fro of the whole excited mass of unwashed faces and brawny shoulders. But Dick had as much pluck as Audley himself; and, by degrees, his pluck and his handsome features, and the curiosity to hear what he had to say, obtained him a hearing; and that hearing, Dick having once got, he contrived to keep. His self-confidence was backed by a grudge against Egerton, that attained to the elevation

of malignity. He had armed himself for this occasion with an arsenal of quotations from Audley's speeches, taken out of Hansard's Debates; and, garbling these texts in the unfairest and most ingenious manner, he contrived to split consistency into such fragments of inconsistency—to cut so many harmless sentences into such unpopular, arbitrary, tyrannical segments of doctrine—that he made a very pretty case against the enlightened and incorruptible Egerton, as shuffler and trimmer, defender of jobs, and eulogist of Manchester massacres, &c. &c. And all told the more because it seemed courted and provoked by the ex-minister's elaborate vindication of himself. Having thus, as he declared, "triumphantly convicted the Right Honourable Gentleman out of his own mouth," Dick considered himself at liberty to diverge into what he termed "the just indignation of a free-born Briton;" in other words, into every variety of abuse which bad taste could supply to acrimonious feeling. But he did it so roundly and dauntlessly, in such true hustings style, that, for the moment at least, he carried the bulk of the crowd along with him sufficiently to bear down all the resentful murmurs of the Blue Committee-men, and the abashed shakes of the head with which the more aristocratic and well-bred among the Yellows signified to each other that they were heartily ashamed of their candidate. Dick concluded with an emphatic declaration that the Right Honourable Gentleman's day was gone by; that the people had been pillaged and plundered enough by pompous red-tapists, who only thought of their salaries,

and never went to their offices except to waste the pen, ink, and paper, which they did not pay for; that the Right Honourable Gentleman had boasted he had served his country for twenty years. Served his country!—he should have said, served her *out!* (Much laughter.) Pretty mess this country was in now. In short, for twenty years the Right Honourable Gentleman had put his hands into his country's pockets.—"And I ask you," bawled Dick, "whether any of you are a bit the better for all that he has taken out of them!" The Hundred and Fifty Hesitators shook their heads. "Noa, that we ben't!" cried the Hundred and Fifty dolorously. "*You* hear THE PEOPLE!" said Dick, turning majestically to Egerton, who, with his arms folded on his breast, and his upper lip slightly curved, sat like "Atlas unremoved"—"You hear THE PEOPLE! They condemn you and the whole set of you. I repeat here what I once vowed on a less public occasion—'As sure as my name is Richard Avenel, you shall smart for'—(Dick hesitated)—smart for your contempt of the just rights, honest claims, and enlightened aspirations of your indignant countrymen. The schoolmaster is abroad, and the British Lion is aroused!"

Dick sat down. The curve of contempt had passed from Egerton's lip;—at the name of Avenel, thus harshly spoken, he had suddenly shaded his face with his hand.

But Randal Leslie next arose, and Audley slowly raised his eyes, and looked towards his *protégé* with an expression of kindly interest. What better *début* could

there be for a young man warmly attached to an eminent patron, who had been coarsely assailed — for a political aspirant vindicating the principles which that patron represented? The Blues, palpitating with indignant excitement, all prepared to cheer every sentence that could embody their sense of outrage; even the meanest amongst the Yellows, now that Dick had concluded, dimly aware that their orator had laid himself terribly open, and richly deserved (more especially from the friend of Audley Egerton), whatever punishing retort could vibrate from the heart of a man to the tongue of an orator. A better opportunity for an honest young *débutant* could not exist;—a more disagreeable, annoying, perplexing, unmanageable opportunity for Randal Leslie, the malice of the Fates could not have contrived. How could *he* attack Dick Avenel! —he who counted upon Dick Avenel to win his election? How could he exasperate the Yellows, when Dick's solemn injunction had been—"Say nothing to make the Yellows not vote for you!" How could he identify himself with Egerton's policy, when it was his own policy to make his opponents believe him an unprejudiced sensible youth, who would come all right and all Yellow one of these days! Demosthenes himself would have had a sore throat, worse than when he swallowed the golden cup of Harpalus, had Demosthenes been placed in so cursed a fix. Therefore Randal Leslie may well be excused if he stammered and boggled—if he was appalled by a cheer when he said a word in vindication of Egerton—and looked

cringing and pitiful when he sneaked out a counter civility to Dick. The Blues were sadly disappointed—damped; the Yellows smirked and took heart. Audley Egerton's brows darkened. Harley, who was on the platform, half seen behind the front row, a quiet listener, bent over and whispered drily to Audley—"You should have given a lesson beforehand to your clever young friend. His affection for you overpowers him!"

Audley made no rejoinder, but tore a leaf out of his pocket-book, and wrote, in pencil, these words—"Say that you may well feel embarrassed how to reply to Mr Avenel, because I had especially requested you not to be provoked to one angry expression against a gentleman whose father and brother-in-law gave the majority of two by which I gained my first seat in Parliament; —then plunge at once into general politics." He placed this paper in Randal's hand, just as that unhappy young man was on the point of a thorough breakdown. Randal paused, took breath, read the words attentively, and amidst a general titter; his presence of mind returned to him—he saw a way out of the scrape—collected himself—suddenly raised his head—and in tones unexpectedly firm and fluent, enlarged on the text afforded to him—enlarged so well that he took the audience by surprise—pleased the Blues by an evidence of Audley's generosity—and touched the Yellows by so affectionate a deference to the family of their two candidates. Then the speaker was enabled to come at once to the topics on which he had elaborately prepared himself, and delivered a set harangue—very artfully

put together—temporising, it is true, and trimming, but full of what would have been called admirable tact and discretion in an old stager who did not want to commit himself to anybody or to anything. On the whole, the display became creditable, at least as an evidence of thoughtful reserve, rare in a man so young—too refining and scholastic for oratory, but a very good essay—upon both sides of the question. Randal wiped his pale forehead, and sat down, cheered, especially by the lawyers present, and self-contented. It was now Leonard's turn to speak. Keenly nervous, as men of the literary temperament are—constitutionally shy, his voice trembled as he began. But he trusted, unconsciously, less to his intellect than his warm heart and noble temper—and the warm heart prompted his words, and the noble temper gradually dignified his manner. He took advantage of the sentences which Audley had put into Randal's mouth, in order to efface the impression made by his uncle's rude assault. "Would that the Right Honourable gentleman had himself made that generous and affecting allusion to the services which he had deigned to remember, for, in that case, he (Leonard) was confident that Mr Avenel would have lost all the bitterness which political contest was apt to engender in proportion to the earnestness with which political opinions were entertained. Happy it was when some such milder sentiment as that which Mr Egerton had instructed Mr Leslie to convey, preceded the sharp encounter, and reminded antagonists, as Mr Leslie had so emphatically done, that every shield had

two sides, and that it was possible to maintain the one side to be golden, without denying the truth of the champion who asserted the other side to be silver." Then, without appearing to throw over his uncle, the young speaker contrived to insinuate an apology on his uncle's behalf, with such exquisite grace and good feeling, that he was loudly cheered by both parties; and even Dick did not venture to utter the dissent which struggled to his lips.

But if Leonard dealt thus respectfully with Egerton, he had no such inducements to spare Randal Leslie. With the intuitive penetration of minds accustomed to analyse character and investigate human nature, he detected the varnished insincerity of Randal's artful address. His colour rose—his voice swelled—his fancy began to play, and his wit to sparkle—when he came to take to pieces his younger antagonist's rhetorical mosaic. He exposed the falsehood of its affected moderation—he tore into shreds the veil of words, with their motley woof of yellow and blue—and showed that not a single conviction could be discovered behind it. "Mr Leslie's speech," said he, "puts me in mind of a ferry-boat; it seems made for no purpose but to go from one side to the other." The simile hit the truth so exactly, that it was received with a roar of laughter: even Egerton smiled. "For myself," concluded Leonard, as he summed up his unsparing analysis, "I am new to party warfare; yet, if I were not opposing Mr Leslie as a candidate for your suffrages, if I were but an elector—belonging, as I do, to

the people by my condition and my labours—I should feel that he is one of those politicians in whom the welfare, the honour, the moral elevation of the people, find no fitting representative."

Leonard sat down amidst great applause, and after a speech that raised the Yellows in their own estimation and materially damaged Randal Leslie in the eyes of the Blues. Randal felt this with a writhing of the heart, though a sneer on the lips. He glanced furtively towards Dick Avenel, on whom, after all, his election, in spite of the Blues, might depend. Dick answered the furtive glance by an encouraging wink. Randal turned to Egerton, and whispered to him—"How I wish I had had more practice in speaking, so that I could have done you more justice!"

"Thank you, Leslie; Mr Fairfield has supplied any omission of yours, so far as I am concerned. And you should excuse him for his attack on yourself, because it may serve to convince you where your fault as a speaker lies."

"Where?" asked Leslie, with jealous sullenness.

"In not believing a single word that you say," answered Egerton, very drily; and then turning away, he said aloud to his proposer, and with a slight sigh, "Mr Avenel may be proud of his nephew! I wish that young man were on our side; I could train him into a great debater."

And now the proceedings were about to terminate with a show of hands, when a tall brawny elector in the middle of the hall suddenly arose, and said he had

some questions to put. A thrill ran through the assembly, for this elector was the demagogue of the Yellows—a fellow whom it was impossible to put down —a capital speaker, with lungs of brass. "I shall be very short," said the demagogue. And therewith, under the shape of questions to the two Blue candidates, he commenced a most furious onslaught on the Earl of Lansmere, and the Earl's son, Lord L'Estrange, accusing the last of the grossest intimidation and corruption, and citing instances thereof as exhibited towards various electors in Fish Lane and the Back Slums, who had been turned from Yellow promises by the base arts of Blue aristocracy, represented in the person of the noble lord whom he now dared to reply. The orator paused, and Harley suddenly passed into the front of the platform, in token that he accepted the ungracious invitation. Great as had been the curiosity to hear Audley Egerton, yet greater, if possible, was the curiosity to hear Lord L'Estrange. Absent from the place for so many years —heir to such immense possessions—with a vague reputation for talents that he had never proved—strange, indeed, if Blue and Yellow had not strained their ears and hushed their breaths to listen.

It is said that the poet is born, and the orator made—a saying only partially true. Some men have been made poets, and some men have been born orators. Most probably Harley L'Estrange had hitherto never spoken in public, and he had not now spoken five minutes before all the passions and humours of the assembly were as much under his command as the keys of the instrument are

under the hands of the musician. He had taken from nature a voice capable of infinite variety of modulation, a countenance of the most flexile play of expression; and he was keenly alive (as profound humorists are) equally to the ludicrous and the graver side of everything presented to his vigorous understanding. Leonard had the eloquence of a poet—Audley Egerton that of a parliamentary debater. But Harley had the rarer gift of eloquence in itself, apart from the matter it conveys or adorns—that gift which Demosthenes meant by his triple requisite of an orator, which has been improperly translated "action," but means in reality the "*acting*," — "the stage-play." Both Leonard and Audley spoke well, from the good sense which their speeches contained; but Harley could have talked nonsense, and made it more effective than sense—even as a Kemble or Macready could produce effects from the trash talked by "The Stranger," which your merely accomplished performer would fail to extract from the beauties of Hamlet. The art of oratory, indeed, is allied more closely to that of the drama than to any other; and throughout Harley's whole nature their ran, as the reader may have noted (though quite unconsciously to Harley himself), a tendency towards that concentration of thought, action, and circumstance, on a single purpose, which makes the world form itself into a stage, and gathers various and scattered agencies into the symmetry and compactness of a drama. This tendency, though it often produces effects that appear artificially theatrical, is not uncommon with persons the

most genuine and single-minded. It is, indeed, the natural inclination of quick energies springing from warm emotions. Hence the very history of nations in their fresh, vigorous, half-civilised youth, always shapes itself into dramatic forms; while, as the exercise of sober reason expands with civilisation, to the injury of the livelier faculties and more intuitive impulses, people look to the dramatic form of expression, whether in thought or in action, as if it were the antidote to truth, instead of being its abstract and essence.

But to return from this long and somewhat metaphysical digression, whatever might be the cause why Harley L'Estrange spoke so wonderfully well, there could be no doubt that wonderfully well he did speak. He turned the demagogue and his attack into the most felicitous ridicule, and yet with the most genial good-humour; described that virtuous gentleman's adventures in search of corruption through the pure regions of Fish Lane and the Back Slums; and then summed up the evidences on which the demagogue had founded his charge, with a humour so caustic and original that the audience were convulsed with laughter. From laughter Harley hurried his audience almost to the pathos of tears — for he spoke of the insinuations against his father, so that every son and every father in the assembly felt moved as at the voice of Nature.

A turn in a sentence, and a new emotion seized the assembly. Harley was identifying himself with the Lansmere electors. He spoke of his pride in being a Lansmere man, and all the Lansmere electors suddenly

felt proud of him. He talked with familiar kindness of old friends remembered in his schoolboy holidays, rejoicing to find so many alive and prospering. He had a felicitous word to each.

"Dear old Lansmere!" said he, and the simple exclamation won him the hearts of all. In fine, when he paused, as if to retire, it was amidst a storm of acclamation. Audley grasped his hand, and whispered —"I am the only one here not surprised, Harley. Now you have discovered your powers, never again let them slumber. What a life may be yours if you no longer waste it!" Harley extricated his hand, and his eye glittered. He made a sign that he had more to say, and the applause was hushed. "My Right Honourable friend chides me for the years that I have wasted. True; my years have been wasted—no matter how nor wherefore! But *his!*—how have *they* been spent? in such devotion to the public, that those who know him not as I do, have said that he had not one feeling left to spare to the obscurer duties and more limited affections, by which men of ordinary talents and humble minds rivet the links of that social order which it is the august destiny of statesmen—like him who now sits beside me—to cherish and defend. But, for my part, I think that there is no being so dangerous as the solemn hypocrite, who, because he drills his cold nature into serving mechanically some conventional abstraction—whether he calls it 'the Constitution' or 'the Public'—holds himself dispensed from whatever, in the warm blood of private life, wins attachment to

goodness and confidence to truth. Let others, then, praise my Right Honourable friend as the incorruptible politician. Pardon me if I draw his likeness as the loyal, sincere man, who might say with the honest priest, 'that he could not tell a lie, to gain Heaven by it!"—and with so fine a sense of honour, that he would hold it a lie merely to conceal the truth." Harley then drew a brilliant picture of the type of chivalrous honesty —of the ideal which the English attach to the phrase of "a perfect gentleman," applying each sentence to his Right Honourable friend with an emphasis that seemed to burst from his heart. To all of the audience, save two, it was an eulogium which the fervent sincerity of the eulogist alone saved from hyperbole. But Levy rubbed his hands, and chuckled inly; and Egerton hung his head, and moved restlessly on his seat. Every word that Harley uttered, lodged an arrow in Audley's breast. Amidst the cheers that followed this admirable sketch of the "loyal man," Harley recognised Leonard's enthusiastic voice. He turned sharply towards the young man: "Mr Fairfield cheers this description of integrity, and its application; let him imitate the model set before him, and he may live to hear praise as genuine as mine from some friend who has tested his worth as I have tested Mr Egerton's. Mr Fairfield is a poet: his claim to that title was disputed by one of the speakers who preceded me! —unjustly disputed! Mr Fairfield is every inch a poet. But, it has been asked, 'Are poets fit for the business

of senates? Will they not be writing sonnets to Peggy and Moggy, when you want them to concentrate their divine imagination on the details of a beer bill?' Do not let Mr Fairfield's friends be alarmed. At the risk of injury to the two candidates whose cause I espouse, truth compels me to say, that poets, when they stoop to action, are not less prosaic than the dullest amongst us: they are swayed by the same selfish interests—they are moved by the same petty passions. It is a mistake to suppose that any detail in common life, whether in public or private, can be too mean to seduce the exquisite pliances of their fancy. Nay, in public life, we may trust them better than other men; for vanity is a kind of second conscience, and, as a poet has himself said—

> 'Who fears not to do ill, yet fears the name,
> And, free from conscience, is a slave to shame.'

In private life alone we do well to be on our guard against these children of fancy, for they so devote to the Muse all their treasury of sentiment, that we can no more expect them to waste a thought on the plain duties of men, than we can expect the spendthrift, who dazzles the town, 'to fritter away his money in paying his debts.' But all the world are agreed to be indulgent to the infirmities of those who are their own deceivers and their own chastisers. Poets have more enthusiasm, more affection, more heart than others; but only for fictions of their own creating. It is in

vain for us to attach them to ourselves by vulgar merit, by commonplace obligations—strive and sacrifice as we may. They are ungrateful to us, only because gratitude is so very unpoetical a subject. We lose them the moment we attempt to bind. Their love,

> 'Light as air, at sight of human ties,
> Spreads its light wings, and in a moment flies.'

They follow their own caprices—adore their own delusions—and, deeming the forms of humanity too material for their fantastic affections, conjure up a ghost, and are chilled to death by its embrace!"

Then, suddenly aware that he was passing beyond the comprehension of his audience, and touching upon the bounds of his bitter secret (for here he was thinking, not of Leonard, but of Nora), Harley gave a new and more homely direction to his terrible irony—turned into telling ridicule the most elevated sentiments Leonard's speech had conveyed—hastened on to a rapid view of political questions in general—defended Leslie with the same apparent earnestness and latent satire with which he had eulogised Audley—and concluded a speech which, for popular effect, had never been equalled in that hall, amidst a diapason of cheers that threatened to bring down the rafters.

In a few minutes more, the proceedings were closed—a show of hands taken. The show was declared by the Mayor, who was a thorough Blue, in favour of the Right Hon. Audley Egerton and Randal Leslie, Esq.

Cries of "No," "Shame," "Partial," &c.—a poll demanded on behalf of the other two candidates—and the crowd began to pour out of the hall.

Harley was the first who vanished, retreating by the private entrance. Egerton followed; Randal, lingering, Avenel came up and shook hands with him openly, but whispered, privately, "Meet me to-night in Lansmere Park, in the oak copse, about three hundred yards from the turnstile, at the town end of the park. We must see how to make all right. What a confounded humbug this has been!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

If the vigour of Harley's address had taken by surprise both friend and foe, not one in that assembly—not even the conscience-stricken Egerton—felt its effect so deeply as the assailed and startled Leonard. He was at first perfectly stunned by sarcasms which he so ill deserved; nor was it till after the assembly had broken up that Leonard could even conjecture the cause which had provoked the taunt and barbed its dart. Evidently Harley had learned (but learned only in order to misconceive and to wrong) Leonard's confession of love to Helen Digby. And now those implied accusations of disregard to the duties of common life not only galled the young man's heart, but outraged his honour. He felt the generous indignation of manhood. He must see Lord L'Estrange at once, and vindicate himself—vindicate Helen; for thus to accuse one, was tacitly to asperse the other.

Extricating himself from his own enthusiastic partisans, Leonard went straight on foot towards Lansmere House. The park palings touched close upon the town, with a small turnstile for foot-passengers. And as Leonard, availing himself of this entrance, had advanced

some hundred yards or so through the park, suddenly, in the midst of that very copse in which Avenel had appointed to meet Leslie, he found himself face to face with Helen Digby herself.

Helen started, with a faint cry. But Leonard, absorbed in his own desire to justify both, hailed the sight, and did not pause to account for his appearance, nor to soothe her agitation.

"Miss Digby!" he exclaimed, throwing into his voice and manner that respect which often so cruelly divides the past familiarity from the present alienation—"Miss Digby, I rejoice to see you—rejoice to ask your permission to relieve myself from a charge, that in truth wounds even you, while levelled but at me. Lord L'Estrange has just implied, in public, that I—I—who owe him so much—who have honoured him so truly, that even the just resentment I now feel, half seems to me the ingratitude with which he charges me—has implied that—ah! Miss Digby, I can scarcely command words to say what it so humiliates me to have heard. But you know how false is all accusation that either of us could deceive our common benefactor. Suffer me to repeat to your guardian what I presumed to say to you when we last met—what you answered—and state how I left your presence."

"Oh, Leonard! yes: clear yourself in his eyes. Go! Unjust that he is—ungenerous Lord L'Estrange!"

"Helen Digby!" cried a voice, close at hand, "of whom do you speak thus?"

At the sound of that voice, Helen and Leonard both

turned, and beheld Violante standing before them, her young beauty rendered almost sublime by the noble anger that lit her eyes, glowed in her cheeks, animated her stately form.

"Is it you who thus speak of Lord L'Estrange? You—Helen Digby—*you!*"

From behind Violante now emerged Mr Dale. "Softly, children," he said; and placing one hand on Violante's shoulder, he extended the other to Leonard. "What is this? Come hither to me, Leonard, and explain."

Leonard walked aside with the Parson, and in a few sentences gave vent to his swelling heart.

The Parson shared in Leonard's resentment; and having soon drawn from him all that had passed in his memorable interview with Helen, exclaimed—

"Enough! Do not yet seek Lord L'Estrange yourself; I am going to see him—I am here at his request. His summons, indeed, was for to-morrow; but the Squire having written me a hurried line, requesting me to meet him at Lansmere to-morrow, and proceed with him afterwards in search of poor Frank, I thought I might have little time for communications with Lord L'Estrange, unless I forestalled his invitation and came to-day. Well that I did so. I only arrived an hour since—found he was gone to the Town-Hall—and joined the young ladies in the Park. Miss Digby, thinking it natural that I might wish to say something in private to my old young friend Violante, walked a few paces in advance. Thus, fortunately, I chanced to be here, to

receive your account, and I trust to remove misunderstanding. Lord L'Estrange must now be returned. I will go back to the house. You, meanwhile, return to the town, I beseech you. I will come to you afterwards at your inn. Your very appearance in these grounds—even the brief words that have passed between Helen and you—might only widen the breach between yourself and your benefactor. I cannot bear to anticipate this. Go back, I entreat you. I will explain all, and Lord L'Estrange shall right you. That *is*—that must be his intention!"

"*Is—must* be his intention—when he has just so wronged me!"

"Yes, yes," faltered the poor Parson, mindful of his promise to L'Estrange not to reveal his own interview with that nobleman, and yet not knowing otherwise how to explain or to soothe. But, still believing Leonard to be Harley's son, and remembering all that Harley had so pointedly said of atonement, in apparent remorse for crime, Mr Dale was wholly at a loss himself to understand why Harley should have thus prefaced atonement by an insult. Anxious, however, to prevent a meeting between Harley and Leonard, while both were under the influence of such feelings towards each other, he made an effort over himself, and so well argued in favour of his own diplomacy, that Leonard reluctantly consented to wait for Mr Dale's report.

"As to reparation or excuse," said he, proudly, "it must rest with Lord L'Estrange. I ask it not. Tell him only this—that if, the instant I heard that she

whom I loved and held sacred for so many years was affianced to him, I resigned even the very wish to call her mine—if that were desertion of man's duties, I am guilty. If to have prayed night and day that she who would have blessed my lonely and toilsome life may give some charm to his, not bestowed by his wealth and his greatness—if that were ingratitude, I am ungrateful; let him still condemn me. I pass out of his sphere—a thing that has crossed it a moment, and is gone. But Helen he must not blame—suspect—even by a thought. One word more. In this election—this strife for objects wholly foreign to all my habits, unsuited to my poverty, at war with aspirations so long devoted to fairer goals, though by obscurer paths—I obeyed but his will or whim; at a moment, too, when my whole soul sickened for repose and solitude. I had forced myself at last to take interest in what I had before loathed. But in every hope for the future—every stimulant to ambition—Lord L'Estrange's esteem still stood before me. Now, what do I here longer? All of his conduct, save his contempt for myself, is an enigma. And unless he repeat a wish, which I would fain still regard as a law, I retire from the contest he has embittered—I renounce the ambition he has poisoned; and, mindful of those humble duties which he implies that I disdain, I return to my own home."

The Parson nodded assent to each of these sentences, and Leonard, passing by Violante and Helen, with a salutation equally distant to both, retraced his steps towards the town.

Meanwhile Violante and Helen had also been in close conference, and that conference had suddenly endeared each to the other; for Helen, taken by surprise, agitated, overpowered, had revealed to Violante that confession of another attachment, which she had made to Lord L'Estrange—the rupture of her engagement with the latter. Violante saw that Harley was free. Harley, too, had promised to free herself. By a sudden flash of conviction, recalling his words, looks, she felt that she was beloved—deemed that honour alone (while either was yet shackled) had forbidden him to own that love. Violante stood a being transformed, "blushing celestial rosy red"—Heaven at her heart, joy in her eyes;—she loved so well, and she trusted so implicitly! Then from out the overflow of her own hope and bliss she poured forth such sweet comfort to Helen, that Helen's arm stole around her—cheek touched cheek—they were as sisters.

At another moment, Mr Dale might have felt some amazement at the sudden affection which had sprung up between these young persons; for in his previous conversation with Violante, he had, as he thought, very artfully, and in a pleasant vein, sounded the young Italian as to her opinion of her fair friend's various good qualities—and Violante had rather shrunk from the title of "friend;" and though she had the magnanimity to speak with great praise of Helen, the praise did not sound cordial. But the good man was at this moment occupied in preparing his thoughts for his interview

with Harley,—he joined the two girls in silence, and, linking an arm of each within his own, walked slowly towards the house. As he approached the terrace, he observed Riccabocca and Randal pacing the gravel walk side by side.

Violante, pressing his arm, whispered, "Let us go round the other way; I would speak with you a few minutes undisturbed."

Mr Dale, supposing that Violante wished to dispense with the presence of Helen, said to the latter, "My dear young lady, perhaps you will excuse me to Dr Riccabocca—who is beckoning to me, and no doubt very much surprised to see me here—while I finish what I was saying to Violante when we were interrupted."

Helen left them, and Violante led the Parson round through the shrubbery, towards a side-door in another wing of the house.

"What have you to say to me?" asked Mr Dale, surprised that she remained silent.

"You will see Lord L'Estrange. Be sure that you convince him of Leonard's honour. A doubt of treachery so grieves his noble heart, that perhaps it may disturb his judgment."

"You seem to think very highly of the heart of this Lord L'Estrange, child!" said the Parson, in some surprise.

Violante blushed, but went on firmly, and with serious earnestness. "Some words which he—that is, Lord L'Estrange—said to me very lately, make me so

glad that you are here—that you will see him; for I know how good you are, and how wise—dear, dear Mr Dale. He spoke as one who had received some grievous wrong, which had abruptly soured all his views of life. He spoke of retirement—solitude; he on whom his country has so many claims. I know not what he can mean—unless it be that his—his marriage with Helen Digby is broken off."

"Broken off! Is that so?"

"I have it from herself. You may well be astonished that she could even think of another after having known him!"

The Parson fixed his eyes very gravely on the young enthusiast. But though her cheek glowed, there was in her expression of face so much artless, open innocence, that Mr Dale contented himself with a slight shake of the head, and a dry remark:—

"I think it quite natural that Helen Digby should prefer Leonard Fairfield. A good girl, not misled by vanity and ambition; temptations of which it behoves us all to beware—nor least, perhaps, young ladies suddenly brought in contact with wealth and rank. As to this nobleman's merits, I know not yet whether to allow or to deny them; I reserve my judgment till after our interview. This is all you have to say to me?"

Violante paused a moment. "I cannot think," she said, half-smiling—"I cannot think that the change that has occurred in him—for changed he is—that his obscure hints as to injury received, and justice to be done, are caused merely by his disappointment with

regard to Helen. But you can learn that; learn if he be so very much disappointed. Nay, I think not!"

She slipped her slight hand from the Parson's arm, and darted away through the evergreens. Half-concealed amidst the laurels, she turned back, and Mr Dale caught her eye—half arch—half melancholy; its light came soft through a tear.

"I don't half like this," muttered the Parson; "I shall give Dr Riccabocca a caution." So muttering, he pushed open the side-door, and, finding a servant, begged admittance to Lord L'Estrange.

Harley at that moment was closeted with Levy, and his countenance was composed and fearfully stern. "So, so, by this time to-morrow," said he, "Mr Egerton will be tricked out of his election by Mr Randal Leslie—good! By this time to-morrow his ambition will be blasted by the treachery of his friends—good! By this time to-morrow the bailiffs will seize his person—ruined, beggared, pauper, and captive—all because he has trusted and been deceived—good! And if he blame you, prudent Baron Levy—if he accuse smooth Mr Randal Leslie—forget not to say, 'We were both but the blind agents of your friend Harley L'Estrange. Ask *him* why you are so miserable a dupe.'"

"And might I now ask your lordship for one word of explanation?"

"No, sir!—it is enough that I have spared *you*. But you were never my friend; I have no revenge against a man whose hand I never even touched."

The Baron scowled, but there was a power about his tyrant that cowed him into actual terror. He resumed, after a pause—

"And though Mr Leslie is to be member for Lansmere—thanks to you—you still desire that I should——"

"Do exactly as I have said. My plans now never vary a hair's-breadth."

The groom of the chambers entered.

"My lord, the Reverend Mr Dale wishes to know if you can receive him."

"Mr Dale! he should have come to-morrow. Say that I did not expect him to-day: that I am unfortunately engaged till dinner, which will be earlier than usual. Show him into his room; he will have but little time to change his dress. By the way, Mr Egerton dines in his own apartment."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE leading members of the Blue Committee were invited to dine at the Park, and the hour for the entertainment was indeed early, as there might be much need yet of active exertion on the eve of a poll in a contest expected to be so close, and in which the inflexible Hundred and Fifty "Waiters upon Providence" still reserved their very valuable votes.

The party was gay and animated, despite the absence of Audley Egerton, who, on the plea of increased indisposition, had shut himself up in his rooms the instant that he had returned from the Town Hall, and sent word to Harley that he was too unwell to join the party at dinner.

Randal was really in high spirits, despite the very equivocal success of his speech. What did it signify if a speech failed, provided the election was secure? He was longing for the appointment with Dick Avenel, which was to make "all right!" The Squire was to bring the money for the purchase of the coveted lands the next morning. Riccabocca had assured him, again and again, of Violante's hand. If ever Randal Leslie could be called a happy man, it was as he sat at that

dinner taking wine with Mr Mayor and Mr Alderman, and looking, across the gleaming silver *plateau*, down the long vista into wealth and power.

The dinner was scarcely over, when Lord L'Estrange, in a brief speech, reminded his guests of the work still before them; and after a toast to the health of the future members for Lansmere, dismissed the Committee to their labours.

Levy made a sign to Randal, who followed the Baron to his own room.

"Leslie, your election is in some jeopardy. I find, from the conversation of those near me at dinner, that Egerton has made such way amongst the Blues by his speech, and they are so afraid of losing a man who does them so much credit, that the Committee-men not only talk of withholding from you their second votes and of plumping Egerton, but of subscribing privately amongst themselves to win over that coy body of a Hundred and Fifty, upon whom I know that Avenel counts in whatever votes he may be able to transfer to you."

"It would be very unhandsome in the Committee, which pretends to act for both of us, to plump Egerton," said Randal, with consistent anger. "But I don't think they can get those Hundred and Fifty without the most open and exorbitant bribery—an expense which Egerton will not pay, and which it would be very discreditable to Lord L'Estrange or his father to countenance."

"I told them flatly," returned Levy, "that, as Mr

Egerton's agent, I would allow no proceedings that might vitiate the election; but that I would undertake the management of these men myself; and I am going into the town in order to do so. I have also persuaded the leading Committee-men to reconsider their determination to plump Egerton: they have decided to do as L'Estrange directs; and I know what he will say. You may rely on me," continued the Baron, who spoke with a dogged seriousness, unusual to his cynical temper, "to obtain for you the preference over Audley, if it be in my power to do so. Meanwhile, you should really see Avenel this very night."

"I have an appointment with him at ten o'clock; and, judging by his speech against Egerton, I cannot doubt of his aid to me, if convinced by his poll-books that he is not able to return both himself and his impertinent nephew. My speech, however sarcastically treated by Mr Fairfield, must at least have disposed the Yellow party to vote rather for me than for a determined opponent like Egerton."

"I hope so; for your speech and Fairfield's answer have damaged you terribly with the Blues. However, your main hope rests on my power to keep those Hundred and Fifty rascals from splitting their votes on Egerton, and to induce them, by all means, short of bringing myself before a Committee of the House of Commons for positive bribery—which would hurt most seriously my present social position—to give one vote to you. I shall tell them, as I have told the Com-

mittee, that Egerton is safe, and will pay nothing; but that you want the votes, and that I—in short, if they can be bought *upon tick*, I will buy them. Avenel, however, can serve you best here; for, as they are all Yellows at heart, they make no scruple of hinting that they want twice as much for voting Blue as they will take for voting Yellow. And Avenel being a townsman, and knowing their ways, could contrive to gain them, and yet not bribe."

RANDAL (shaking his head incredulously).—"Not bribe!"

LEVY.—"Pooh! Not bribe so as to be found out."

There was a knock at the door. A servant entered and presented Mr Egerton's compliments to Baron Levy, with a request that the Baron would immediately come to his rooms for a few minutes.

"Well," said Levy, when the servant had withdrawn, "I must go to Egerton, and the instant I leave him I shall repair to the town. Perhaps I may pass the night there." So saying, he left Randal, and took his way to Audley's apartment.

"Levy," said the statesman, abruptly, upon the entrance of the Baron, "have you betrayed my secret —my first marriage—to Lord L'Estrange?"

"No, Egerton; on my honour, I have not betrayed it."

"You heard his speech! Did you not detect a fearful irony under his praises?—or is it but—but—my conscience?" added the proud man, through his set teeth.

"Really," said Levy, "Lord L'Estrange seemed to me to select for his praise precisely those points in your character which any other of your friends would select for panegyric."

"Ay, any other of my friends!—What friends?" muttered Egerton, gloomily. Then, rousing himself, he added, in a voice that had none of its accustomed clear firmness of tone, "Your presence here in this house, Levy, surprised me, as I told you at the first; I could not conceive its necessity. Harley urged you to come?—he with whom you are no favourite! You and he both said that your acquaintance with Richard Avenel would enable you to conciliate his opposition. I cannot congratulate you on your success."

"My success remains to be proved. The vehemence of his attack to-day may be but a feint to cover his alliance to-morrow."

Audley went on without notice of the interruption. "There is a change in Harley—to me and to all; a change, perhaps not perceptible to others—but I have known him from a boy."

"He is occupied for the first time with the practical business of life.—That would account for a much greater change than you remark."

"Do you see him familiarly?—converse with him often?"

"No, and only on matters connected with the election. Occasionally, indeed, he consults me as to Randal Leslie, in whom, as your special *protégé*, he takes considerable interest."

"That, too, surprises me. Well, I am weary of perplexing myself.—This place is hateful; after to-morrow I shall leave it, and breathe in peace. You have seen the reports of the canvass; I have had no heart to inspect them. Is the election as safe as they say?"

"If Avenel withdraws his nephew, and the votes thus relieved split off to you, you are secure."

"And you think his nephew will be withdrawn? Poor young man!—defeat at his age, and with such talents, is hard to bear." Audley sighed.

"I *must* leave you now, if you have nothing important to say," said the Baron, rising. "I have much to do, as the election is yet to be won, and—to you the loss of it would be——"

"Ruin, I know. Well, Levy, it is, on the whole, to your advantage that I should not lose. There may be more to get from me yet. And, judging by the letters I received this morning, my position is rendered so safe by the absolute necessity of my party to keep me up, that the news of my pecuniary difficulties will not affect me so much as I once feared. Never was my career so free from obstacle—so clear towards the highest summit of ambition—never, in my day of ostentatious magnificence, as it is now, when I am prepared to shrink into a lodging, with a single servant."

"I am glad to hear it, and I am the more anxious to secure your election, upon which this career must depend, because—nay, I hardly like to tell you——"

"Speak on."

"I have been obliged, by a sudden rush on all my

resources, to consign some of your bills and promissory notes to another, who, if your person should not be protected from arrest by parliamentary privilege, might be harsh, and——"

"Traitor!" interrupted Egerton, fiercely, all the composed contempt with which he usually treated the usurer giving way, "say no more.—How could I ever expect otherwise! You have foreseen my defeat, and have planned my destruction. Presume no reply. Sir, begone from my presence!"

"You will find that you have worse friends than myself," said the Baron, moving to the door; "and if you are defeated—if your prospects for life are destroyed—I am the last man you will think of blaming But I forgive your anger, and trust that to-morrow you will receive those explanations of my conduct which you are now in no temper to bear. I go to take care of the election."

Left alone, Audley's sudden passion seemed to forsake him. He gathered together, in that prompt and logical precision which the habit of transacting public business bestows, all his thoughts, and sounded all his fears; and most vivid of every thought, and most intolerable of every fear, was the belief that the Baron had betrayed him to L'Estrange.

"I cannot bear this suspense," he cried aloud and abruptly. "I will see Harley myself. Open as he is, the very sound of his voice will tell me at once if I am a bankrupt, even of human friendship. If *that* friendship be secure—if Harley yet clasp my hand with the

same cordial warmth—all other loss shall not wring from my fortitude one complaint."

He rang the bell: his valet, who was waiting in the ante-room, appeared.

"Go and see if Lord L'Estrange is engaged; I would speak with him."

The servant came back in less than two minutes.

"I find that my lord is now particularly engaged, since he has given strict orders that he is not to be disturbed."

"Engaged!—on what?—whom with?"

"He is in his own room, sir, with a clergyman, who arrived, and dined here to-day. I am told that he was formerly curate of Lansmere."

"Lansmere—curate! His name—his name! Not Dale?"

"Yes, sir, that is the name—the Reverend Mr Dale."

"Leave me," said Audley, in a faint voice. "Dale! the man who suspected Harley, who called on me in London, spoke of a child—my child—and sent me to find but another grave. He closeted with Harley—he!"

Audley sank back on his chair, and literally gasped for breath. Few men in the world had a more established reputation for the courage that dignifies manhood, whether the physical courage or the moral. But at that moment it was not grief, not remorse, that paralysed Audley—it was fear. The brave man saw before him, as a thing visible and menacing, the aspect

of his own treachery—that crime of a coward; and into cowardice he was stricken. What had he to dread? Nothing save the accusing face of an injured friend—nothing but that. And what more terrible? The only being, amidst all his pomp of partisans, who survived to love him—the only being for whom the cold statesman felt the happy, living, human tenderness of private affection, lost to him for ever. He covered his face with both hands, and sat in suspense of something awful, as a child sits in the dark—the drops on his brow, and his frame trembling.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MEANWHILE, Harley had listened to Mr Dale's vindication of Leonard with cold attention.

"Enough," said he at the close. "Mr Fairfield (for so we will yet call him) shall see me to-night; and if apology be due to him, I will make it. At the same time, it shall be decided whether he continue this contest or retire. And now, Mr Dale, it was not to hear how this young man wooed, or shrunk from wooing, my affianced bride, that I availed myself of your promise to visit me at this house. We agreed that the seducer of Nora Avenel deserved chastisement, and I promised that Nora Avenel's son should find a father. Both these assurances shall be fulfilled to-morrow. And you, sir," continued Harley, rising, his whole form gradually enlarged by the dignity of passion, "who wear the garb appropriated to the holiest office of Christian charity—you have presumed to think that, before the beard had darkened my cheek, I could first betray the girl who had been reared under this roof, then abandon her—sneak like a dastard from the place in which my victim came to die—leave my own son, by the woman thus wronged, without thought or care, through the perilous years of tempted youth, till

I found him, by chance, an outcast in a desert more dread than Hagar's—you, sir, who have for long years thus judged of me, shall have the occasion to direct your holy anger towards the rightful head; and in me, you who have condemned the culprit, shall respect the judge!"

Mr Dale was at first startled, and almost awed, by this unexpected burst. But, accustomed to deal with the sternest and the darkest passions, his calm sense and his habit of authority over those whose souls were bared to him, nobly recovered from their surprise. "My lord," said he, "first, with humility I bow to your rebuke, and entreat your pardon for my erring, and, as you say, my uncharitable opinions. We, dwellers in a village, and obscure pastors of a humble flock —we, mercifully removed from temptation, are too apt, perhaps, to exaggerate its power over those whose lots are cast in that great world which has so many gates ever open to evil. This is my sole excuse if I was misled by what appeared to me strong circumstantial evidence. But forgive me again if I warn you not to fall into an error perhaps little lighter than my own. Your passion, when you cleared yourself from reproach, became you. But ah! my lord, when with that stern brow and those flashing eyes you launched your menace upon another over whom you would constitute yourself the judge, forgetful of the divine precept, 'Judge not,' I felt that I was listening no longer to honest self-vindication—I felt that I was listening to fierce revenge."

"Call it revenge, or what you will," said Harley with sullen firmness. "But I have been stung too deeply not to sting. Frank with all, till the last few days, I have ever been. Frank to you, at least, even now, this much I tell you: I pretend to no virtue in what I still hold to be justice; but no declamations nor homilies tending to prove that justice is sinful, will move my resolves. As man I have been outraged, and as man I will retaliate. The way and the mode—the true criminal and his fitting sentence—you will soon learn, sir. I have much to do to-night: forgive me if I adjourn for the present all further conference."

"No, no; do not dismiss me. There is something, in spite of your present language, which so commands my interest, I see that there has been so much suffering where there is now so much wrath, that I would save you from the suffering worse than all—remorse. O pause, my dear lord, pause and answer me but two questions; then I will leave your after course to yourself."

"Say on, sir," said Lord L'Estrange, touched, and with respect.

"First, then, analyse your own feelings. Is this anger merely to punish an offender and to right the living?—for who can pretend to right the dead? Or is there not some private hate that stirs, and animates, and confuses all?"

Harley remained silent. Mr Dale renewed.

"You loved this poor girl. Your language even now reveals it. You speak of treachery: perhaps you had a rival who deceived you; I know not—guess not,

who. But if you would strike the rival, must you not wound the innocent son? And, in presenting Nora's child to his father, as you pledge yourself to do, can you mean some cruel mockery that, under seeming kindness, implies some unnatural vengeance?"

"You read well the heart of man," said Harley; "and I have owned to you that I am but man. Pass on; you have another question."

"And one more solemn and important. In my world of a village, revenge is a common passion; it is the sin of the uninstructed. The savage deems it noble; but Christ's religion, which is the sublime Civiliser, emphatically condemns it. Why? Because religion ever seeks to ennoble man; and nothing so debases him as revenge. Look into your own heart, and tell me whether, since you have cherished this passion, you have not felt all sense of right and wrong confused—have not felt that whatever would before have seemed to you mean and base, appears now but just means to your heated end. Revenge is ever a hypocrite—rage, at least, strikes with the naked sword; but revenge, stealthy and patient, conceals the weapon of the assassin. My lord, your colour changes. What is your answer to my question?"

"Oh," exclaimed Harley, with a voice thrilling in its mournful anguish, "it is not since I have cherished the revenge that I am changed—that right and wrong grow dark to me—that hypocrisy seems the atmosphere fit for earth. No; it is since the discovery that demands the vengeance. It is useless, sir," he continued, impetuously—"useless to argue with me. Were I to sit

down patient and impotent, under the sense of the wrong which I have received, I should feel, indeed, that debasement which you ascribe to the gratification of what you term revenge. I should never regain the self-esteem which the sentiment of power now restores to me—I should feel as if the whole world could perceive and jeer at my meek humiliation. I know not why I have said so much—why I have betrayed to you so much of my secret mind, and stooped to vindicate my purpose. I never meant it. Again I say, we must close this conference." Harley here walked to the door, and opened it significantly.

"One word more, Lord L'Estrange—but one. You will not hear me. I am a comparative stranger, but you have a friend, a friend dear and intimate, now under the same roof. Will you consent, at least, to take counsel of Mr Audley Egerton? None can doubt his friendship for you; none can doubt, that whatever he advises will be that which best becomes your honour. What, my lord, you hesitate?—you feel ashamed to confide to your dearest friend a purpose which his mind would condemn? Then I will seek him—I will implore him to save you from what can but entail repentance."

"Mr Dale, I must forbid you to see Mr Egerton. What has passed between us ought to be as sacred to you as a priest of Rome holds confession. This much, however, I will say to content you: I promise that I will do nothing that shall render me unworthy of Mr Audley Egerton's friendship, or which his fine sense of

honour shall justify him in blaming. Let that satisfy you."

"Ah, my lord," cried Mr Dale, pausing irresolute at the doorway, and seizing Harley's hand, "I should, indeed, be satisfied if you would submit yourself to higher counsel than mine—than Mr Egerton's—than man's. Have you never felt the efficacy of prayer?"

"My life has been wasted," replied Harley, "and I dare not, therefore, boast that I have found prayer efficacious. But, so far back as I can remember, it has at least been my habit to pray to Heaven, night and morning, until, at least—until——" The natural and obstinate candour of the man forced out the last words, which implied reservation. He stopped short.

"Until you have cherished revenge? You have not dared to pray since? Oh! reflect what evil there is within us, when we dare not come before Heaven—dare not pray for what we wish. You are moved—I leave you to your own thoughts."

Harley inclined his head, and the Parson passed him by, and left him alone—startled indeed; but was he softened?

As Mr Dale hurried along the corridor, much agitated, Violante stole from a recess formed by a large bay-window, and, linking her arm in his, said anxiously, but timidly: "I have been waiting for you, dear Mr Dale; and so long! You have been with Lord L'Estrange?"

"Well."

"Why do you not speak? You have left him comforted—happier?"

"Happier! No."

"What!" said Violante, with a look of surprise, and a sadness not unmixed with petulance in her quick tone. "What! does he then so grieve that Helen prefers another?"

Despite the grave emotions that disturbed his mind, Mr Dale was struck by Violante's question, and the voice in which it was said. He loved her tenderly. "Child, child," said he, "I am glad that Helen has escaped Lord L'Estrange. Beware, oh beware! how he excite any gentler interest in yourself. He is a dangerous man—more dangerous for glimpses of a fine original nature. He may well move the heart of the innocent and inexperienced, for he has strangely crept into mine. But *his* heart is swollen with pride, and ire, and malice."

"You mistake: it is false!" cried Violante, impetuously. "I cannot believe one word that would asperse him who has saved my father from a prison, or from death. You have not treated him gently. He fancies he has been wronged by Leonard—received ingratitude from Helen. He has felt the sting in proportion to his own susceptible and generous heart, and you have chided where you should have soothed. Poor Lord L'Estrange! And you have left him still indignant and unhappy!"

"Foolish girl! I have left him meditating sin; I have left him afraid to pray; I have left him on the brink of some design—I know not what—but which involves more than Leonard in projects of revenge; I

have left him so, that if his heart be really susceptible and generous, he will wake from wrath to be the victim of long and unavailing remorse. If your father has influence over him, tell Dr Riccabocca what I say, and bid him seek, and in his turn save, the man who saved himself. He has not listened to religion—he may be more docile to philosophy. I cannot stay here longer—I must go to Leonard."

Mr Dale broke from Violante, and hurried down the corridor: Violante stood on the same spot, stunned and breathless. Harley on the brink of some strange sin—Harley to wake the victim of remorse—Harley to be saved, as he had saved her father! Her breast heaved—her colour went and came—her eyes were raised—her lips murmured. She advanced with soft footsteps up the corridor—she saw the lights gleaming from Harley's room, and suddenly they were darkened, as the inmate of the room shut to the door, with angry and impatient hand.

An outward act often betrays the inward mind. As Harley had thus closed the door, so had he sought to shut his heart from the intrusion of softer and holier thoughts. He had turned to his hearthstone, and stood on it, resolved and hardened. The man who had loved with such pertinacious fidelity for so many years, could not at once part with hate. A passion once admitted to his breast, clung to it with such rooted force! But woe, woe to thee, Harley L'Estrange, if to-morrow at this hour thou stand at the hearthstone, thy designs accomplished, knowing that, in the fulfil-

ment of thy blind will, thou hast met falsehood with falsehood, and deception with deceit! What though those designs now seem so consummate, so just, so appropriate, so exquisite a revenge—seem to thee the sole revenge wit can plan, and civilised life allow—wilt thou ever wash from thy memory the stain that will sully thine honour? Thou, too, professing friendship still, and masking perfidy under smiles! Grant that the wrong be great as thou deem it—be ten times greater—the sense of thy meanness, O gentleman and soldier, will bring the blush to thy cheek in the depth of thy solitude. Thou, who now thinkest others unworthy a trustful love, wilt feel thyself for ever unworthy theirs. Thy seclusion will know not repose. The dignity of man will forsake thee. Thy proud eye will quail from the gaze. Thy step will no longer spurn the earth that it treads on. He who has once done a base thing is never again wholly reconciled to honour. And woe—thrice woe, if thou learn too late that thou hast exaggerated thy fancied wrong: that there is excuse where thou seest none; that thy friend may have erred, but that his error is venial compared to thy fancied retribution!

Thus, however, in the superb elation of conscious power, though lavished on a miserable object—a terrible example of what changes one evil and hateful thought, cherished to the exclusion of all others, can make in the noblest nature—stood, on the hearth of his fathers, and on the abyss of a sorrow and a shame

from which there could be no recall, the determined and scornful man.

A hand is on the door—he does not hear it; a form passes the threshold—he does not see it; a light step pauses—a soft eye gazes. Deaf and blind still to both.

Violante came on, gathering courage, and stood at the hearth, by his side.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Lord L'Estrange—noble friend!"

"You!—and here—Violante? Is it I whom you seek? For what? Good heavens! what has happened? Why are you so pale?—why tremble?"

"Have you forgiven Helen?" asked Violante, beginning with evasive question, and her cheek was pale no more.

"Helen—the poor child! I have nothing in her to forgive, much to thank her for. She has been frank and honest."

"And Leonard—whom I remember in my childhood—you have forgiven him?"

"Fair mediator," said Harley, smiling, though coldly, "happy is the man who deceives another; all plead for him. And if the man deceived cannot forgive, no one will sympathise or excuse."

"But Leonard did not deceive you?"

"Yes, from the first. It is a long tale, and not to be told to you. But I cannot forgive him."

"Adieu! my Lord. Helen must, then, still be very dear to you!" Violante turned away. Her emotion was so artless, her very anger so charming, that the love,

against which, in the prevalence of his later and darker passions, he had so sternly struggled, rushed back upon Harley's breast; but it came only in storm.

"Stay, but talk not of Helen!" he exclaimed. "Ah! if Leonard's sole offence had been what you appear to deem it, do you think I could feel resentment? No; I should have gratefully hailed the hand that severed a rash and ungenial tie. I would have given my ward to her lover with such a dower as it suits my wealth to bestow. But his offence dates from his very birth. To bliss and to enrich the son of a man who—Violante, listen to me. We may soon part, and for ever. Others may misconstrue my actions; you, at least, shall know from what just principle they spring. There was a man whom I singled out of the world as more than a brother. In the romance of my boyhood I saw one who dazzled my fancy, captivated my heart. It was a dream of Beauty breathed into waking life. I loved—I believed myself beloved. I confided all my heart to this friend—this more than brother; he undertook to befriend and to aid my suit. On that very pretext he first saw this ill-fated girl;—saw—betrayed—destroyed her;—left me ignorant that her love, which I had thought mine, had been lavished so wildly on another;—left me to believe that my own suit she had fled, but in generous self-sacrifice—for she was poor and humbly born;—that—oh, vain idiot that I was!—the self-sacrifice had been too strong for a young human heart, which had broken in the struggle;—left me to corrode my spring of life in remorse;—clasped my hand in

mocking comfort:—smiled at my tears of agony—not one tear himself for his own poor victim! And suddenly, not long since, I learned all this. And, in the father of Leonard Fairfield, you behold the man who has poisoned all the well-spring of joy to me. You weep! O, Violante!—the Past he has blighted and embittered—*that* I could forgive; but the Future is blasted too. For, just ere this treason was revealed to me, I had begun to awake from the torpor of my dreary penance, to look with fortitude towards the duties I had slighted—to own that the pilgrimage before me was not barren. And then, oh then, I felt that all love was not buried in a grave. I felt that you, had fate so granted, might have been all to my manhood which youth only saw through the delusion of its golden mists. True, I was then bound to Helen; true, that honour to her might forbid me all hope. But still, even to know that my heart was not all ashes—that I could love again—that that glorious power and privilege of our being was still mine, seemed to me so heavenly sweet. But then this revelation of falsehood burst on me, and all truth seemed blotted from the universe. I am freed from Helen; ah, freed, forsooth—because not even rank and wealth, and benefits and confiding tenderness, could bind to me one human heart! Free from her; but between me and your fresh nature stand Suspicion as an Upas tree. Not a hope that would pass through the tainted air, and fly to you, but falls dead under the dismal boughs. *I* love! Ha, ha! I—*I*, whom the past has taught the impossibility to be loved again. No: if

those soft lips murmured 'Yes' to the burning prayer that, had I been free but two short weeks ago, would have rushed from the frank deeps of my heart, I should but imagine that you deceived yourself—a girl's first fleeting delusive fancy—nothing more! Were you my bride, Violante, I should but debase your bright nature by my own curse of distrust. At each word of tenderness, my heart would say 'How long will this last?—when will the deception come?' Your beauty, your gifts, would bring me but jealous terror; eternally I should fly from the Present to the Future, and say, 'These hairs will be grey, while flattering youth will surround her in the zenith of her charms.' Why then do I hate and curse my foe? Why do I resolve upon revenge? I comprehend it now. I knew that there was something more imperious than the ghost of the Past that urged me on. Gazing on you, I feel that it was the dim sense of a mighty and priceless loss; it is not the dead Nora—it is the living Violante. Look not at me with those reproachful eyes; they cannot reverse my purpose; they cannot banish suspicion from my sickened soul; they cannot create a sunshine in the midst of this ghastly twilight. Go, go; leave me to the sole joy that bequeaths no disappointment—the sole feeling that unites me to social man; leave me to my revenge."

"Revenge! Oh, cruel!" exclaimed Violante, laying her hand on his arm. "And in revenge, it is your own life that you would risk!"

"My life, simple child! This is no contest of life

against life. Could I bear to all the world my wrongs for their ribald laughter, I should only give to my foe the triumph to pity my frenzy—to shun the contest; or grant it, if I could find a second—and then fire in the air. And all the word would say, 'Generous Egerton!—soul of honour!'"

"Egerton, Mr Egerton! He cannot be this foe? It is not on him you can design revenge?—you who spend all your hours in serving his cause—you to whom he trusts so fondly—you who leant yesterday on his shoulder, and smiled so cheeringly in his face?"

"Did I? Hypocrisy against hypocrisy—snare against snare; *that* is my revenge!"

"Harley, Harley! Cease, cease!"

The storm of passion rushed on unheeding.

"I seem to promote his ambition, but to crush it into the mire. I have delivered him from the gentler gripe of an usurer, so that he shall hold at my option alms or a prison——"

"Friend, friend! Hush, hush!"

"I have made the youth he has reared and fostered into treachery like his own (your father's precious choice —Randal Leslie), mine instrument in the galling lesson how ingratitude can sting. His very son shall avenge the mother, and be led to his father's breast as victor, with Randal Leslie, in the contest that deprives sire and benefactor of all that makes life dear to ambitious egotism. And if, in the breast of Audley Egerton, there can yet lurk one memory of what I was to him and to truth, not his least punishment will be the sense

that his own perfidy has so changed the man whose very scorn of falsehood has taught him to find in fraud itself the power of retribution."

"If this be not a terrible dream!" murmured Violante, recoiling, "it is not your foe alone that you will deprive of all that makes life dear. Act thus—and what, in the future, is left to me?"

"To you? Oh, never fear. I may give Randal Leslie a triumph over his patron, but in the same hour I will unmask his villany, and sweep him for ever from your path. What in the future is left to you?—your birthright and your native land; hope, joy, love, felicity. Could it be possible that in the soft but sunny fancy which plays round the heart of maiden youth, but still sends no warmth into its deeps—could it be possible that you had honoured me with a gentler thought, it will pass away, and you will be the pride and delight of one of your own years, to whom the vista of Time is haunted by no chilling spectres—one who can look upon that lovely face, and not turn away to mutter—'Too fair, too fair for me!'"

"Oh agony!" exclaimed Violante, with sudden passion. "In my turn hear me. If, as you promise, I am released from the dreadful thought that he, at whose touch I shudder, can claim this hand, my choice is irrevocably made. The altars which await me will not be those of a human love. But oh, I implore you—by all the memories of your own life, hitherto, if sorrowful, unsullied—by the generous interest you yet profess for me, whom you will have twice saved from

a danger to which death were mercy—leave, oh leave to me the right to regard your image as I have done from the first dawn of childhood. Leave me the right to honour and revere it. Let not an act accompanied with a meanness—oh that I should say the word!—a meanness and a cruelty that give the lie to your whole life—make even a grateful remembrance of you an unworthy sin. When I kneel within the walls that divide me from the world, oh let me think that I can pray for you as the noblest being that the world contains! Hear me! hear me!"

"Violante!" murmured Harley, his whole frame heaving with emotion, "bear with me. Do not ask of me the sacrifice of what seems to me the cause of manhood itself—to sit down, meek and patient, under a wrong that debases me, with the consciousness that all my life I have been the miserable dupe to affections I deemed so honest—to regrets that I believed so holy. Ah! I should feel more mean in my pardon than you can think me in revenge! Were it an acknowledged enemy, I could open my arms to him at your bidding; but the perfidious friend!—ask it not. My cheek burns at the thought, as at the stain of a blow. Give me but to-morrow—one day—I demand no more—wholly to myself and to the past, and mould me for the future as you will. Pardon, pardon the ungenerous thoughts that extended distrust to *you*. I retract them; they are gone—dispelled before those touching words, those ingenuous eyes. At your feet, Violante, I repent and I implore! Your father himself shall banish your sor-

did suitor. Before this hour to-morrow you will be free. Oh then, then! will you not give me this hand to guide me again into the paradise of my youth? Violante, it is in vain to wrestle with myself—to doubt—to reason—to be wisely fearful—I love, I love you. I trust again in virtue and faith. I place my fate in your keeping."

If at times Violante may appear to have ventured beyond the limit of strict maiden bashfulness, much may be ascribed to her habitual candour, her solitary rearing and remoteness from the world—the very innocence of her soul, and the warmth of heart which Italy gives its daughters. But now that sublimity of thought and purpose which pervaded her nature, and required only circumstances to develop, made her superior to all the promptings of love itself. Dreams realised which she had scarcely dared to own—Harley free—Harley at her feet;—all the woman struggling at her heart, mantling in her blushes,—still stronger than love—stronger than the joy of being loved again—was the heroic will—will to save him—who in all else ruled her existence—from the eternal degradation to which passion had blinded his own confused and warring spirit.

Leaving one hand in his impassioned clasp, as he still knelt before her, she raised on high the other. "Ah!" she said, scarce audibly—"ah! if Heaven vouchsafe me the proud and blissful privilege to be allied to your fate, to minister to your happiness, never should I know one fear of your distrust. No time, no changé, no sorrow—not even the loss of your affection

—could make me forfeit the right to remember that you had once confided to me a heart so noble. But"—here her voice rose in its tone, and the glow fled from her cheek—"But, O Thou the Ever Present, hear and receive the solemn vow. If to me he refuse to sacrifice the sin that would debase him, that sin be the barrier between us evermore. And may my life, devoted to Thy service, atone for the hour in which he belied the nature he received from Thee. Harley, release me! I have spoken: firm as yourself, I leave the choice to you."

"You judge me harshly," said Harley, rising, with sullen anger. "But at least I have not the meanness to sell what I hold as justice, though the bribe may include my last hope of happiness."

"Meanness! Oh unhappy, beloved Harley!" exclaimed Violante, with such a gush of exquisite reproachful tenderness, that it thrilled him as the voice of the parting guardian angel. "Meanness! But it is that from which I implore you to save yourself. You cannot judge, you cannot see. You are dark, dark. Lost Christian that you are, what worse than heathen darkness to feign the friendship the better to betray—to punish falsehood by becoming yourself so false—to accept the confidence even of your bitterest foe, and then to sink below his own level in deceit? And oh—worse, worse than all—to threaten that a son—son of the woman you professed to love—should swell your vengeance against a father. No! it was not you that said this—it was the Fiend!"

"Enough!" exclaimed Harley, startled, conscience-stricken, and rushing into resentment in order to escape the sense of shame. "Enough! you insult the man you professed to honour."

"I honoured the prototype of gentleness and valour. I honoured one who seemed to me to clothe with life every grand and generous image that is born from the souls of poets. Destroy that ideal, and you destroy the Harley whom I honoured. He is dead to me for ever. I will mourn for him as his widow—faithful to his memory—weeping over the thought of what he was." Sobs choked her voice; but as Harley, once more melted, sprang forward to regain her side, she escaped with a yet quicker movement, gained the door, and darting down the corridor, vanished from his sight.

Harley stood still one moment, thoroughly irresolute —nay, almost subdued. Then sternness, though less rigid than before, gradually came to his brow. The demon had still its hold in the stubborn and marvellous pertinacity with which the man clung to all that once struck root at his heart. With a sudden impulse, that still withheld decision, yet spoke of sore-shaken purpose, he strode to his desk, drew from it Nora's manuscript, and passed from his room.

Harley had meant never to have revealed to Audley the secret he had gained, until the moment when revenge was consummated. He had contemplated no vain reproach. His wrath would have spoken forth in deeds, and then a word would have sufficed as the

key to all. Willing, perhaps, to hail some extenuation of perfidy, though the possibility of such extenuation he had never before admitted, he determined on the interview which he had hitherto so obstinately shunned, and went straight to the room in which Audley Egerton still sat solitary and fearful.

CHAPTER XXX.

EGERTON heard the well-known step advancing near and nearer up the corridor—heard the door open and reclose—and he felt, by one of those strange and unaccountable instincts which we call forebodings, that the hour he had dreaded for so many secret years had come at last. He nerved his courage, withdrew his hands from his face, and rose in silence. No less silent, Harley stood before him. The two men gazed on each other; you might have heard their breathing.

"You have seen Mr Dale?" said Egerton, at length. "You know——"

"All!" said Harley, completing the arrested sentence.

Audley drew a long sigh. "Be it so; but no, Harley; you deceive yourself; you cannot know all, from any one living, save myself."

"My knowledge comes from the dead," answered Harley, and the fatal memoir dropped from his hand upon the table. The leaves fell with a dull, low sound, mournful and faint as might be the tread of a ghost, if the tread gave sound. They fell, those still confessions of an obscure, uncomprehended life, amidst letters and

documents eloquent of the strife that was then agitating millions, the fleeting, turbulent fears and hopes that torture parties and perplex a nation; the stormy business of practical public life, so remote from individual love and individual sorrow.

Egerton's eye saw them fall. The room was but partially lighted. At the distance where he stood, he did not recognise the characters, but involuntarily he shivered, and involuntarily drew near.

"Hold yet awhile," said Harley. "I produce my charge, and then I leave you to dispute the only witness that I bring. Audley Egerton, you took from me the gravest trust one man can confide to another. You knew how I loved Leonora Avenel. I was forbidden to see and urge my suit; you had the access to her presence which was denied to myself. I prayed you to remove scruples that I deemed too generous, and to woo her, not to dishonour, but to be my wife. Was it so? Answer."

"It is true," said Audley, his hand clenched at his heart.

"You saw her whom I thus loved—her thus confided to your honour. You wooed her for yourself. Is it so?"

"Harley, I deny it not. Cease here. I accept the penalty;—I resign your friendship;—I quit your roof;—I submit to your contempt;—I dare not implore your pardon. Cease; let me go hence, and soon!"—The strong man gasped for breath.

Harley looked at him steadfastly, then turned away

his eyes, and went on. "Nay," said he, "is that ALL? You wooed her for yourself—you won her. Account to me for that life which you wrenched from mine. You are silent. I will take on myself your task; you took that life and destroyed it."

"Spare me, spare me!"

"What was the fate of her who seemed so fresh from heaven when these eyes beheld her last? A broken heart—a dishonoured name—an early doom—a forgotten gravestone."

"No, no—forgotten—no!"

"Not forgotten! Scarce a year passed, and you were married to another. I aided you to form those nuptials which secured your fortunes. You have had rank, and power, and fame. Peers call you the type of English gentlemen. Priests hold you as a model of Christian honour. Strip the mask, Audley Egerton; let the world know you for what you are!"

Egerton raised his head, and folded his arms calmly; but he said, with a melancholy humility—"I bear all from you; it is just. Say on."

"You took from me the heart of Nora Avenel. You abandoned her—you destroyed. And her memory cast no shadow over your daily sunshine; while over my thoughts—over my life—oh, Egerton—Audley, Audley—how could you have deceived me thus!" Here the inherent tenderness under all this hate—the fount imbedded under the hardening stone—broke out. Harley was ashamed of his weakness, and hurried on.

"Deceived—not for an hour, a day, but through

blighted youth, through listless manhood—you suffered me to nurse the remorse that should have been your own;—her life slain, mine wasted; and shall neither of us have revenge?"

"Revenge! Ah, Harley, you have had it!"

"No, but I await it! Not in vain from the charnel have come to me the records I produce. And whom did fate select to discover the wrongs of the mother?—whom appoint as her avenger? Your son—your own son; your abandoned nameless son!"

"Son—son!"

"Whom I delivered from famine, or from worse; and who, in return, has given into my hands the evidence which proclaims in you the perjured friend of Harley L'Estrange, and the fraudulent seducer, under mock marriage forms—worse than all franker sin—of Leonora Avenel."

"It is false—false!" exclaimed Egerton, all his stateliness and all his energy restored to him. "I forbid you to speak thus to me. I forbid you by one word to sully the memory of my lawful wife."

"Ah!" said Harley, startled, "Ah! false! prove *that*, and revenge is over! Thank Heaven!"

"Prove it! What so easy? And wherefore have I delayed the proof—wherefore concealed, but from tenderness to you—dread, too—a selfish but human dread—to lose in you the sole esteem that I covet;—the only mourner who would have shed one tear over the stone inscribed with some lying epitaph, in which it will suit a party purpose to proclaim the gratitude of a nation.

Vain hope! I resign it! But you spoke of a son. Alas, alas! you are again deceived. I heard that I had a son—years, long years ago. I sought him, and found a grave. But bless you, Harley, if you succoured one whom you even erringly suspect to be Leonora's child!" He stretched forth his hands as he spoke.

"Of your son we will speak later," said Harley, strangely softened. "But before I say more of him, let me ask you to explain—let me hope that you can extenuate what——"

"You are right," interrupted Egerton, with eager quickness. "You would know from my own lips at last the plain tale of my own offence against you. It is due to both. Patiently hear me out."

Then Egerton told all; his own love for Nora—his struggles against what he felt as treason to his friend—his sudden discovery of Nora's love for him;—on that discovery, the overthrow of all his resolutions; their secret marriage—their separation; Nora's flight, to which Audley still assigned but her groundless vague suspicion that their nuptials had not been legal, and her impatience of his own delay in acknowledging the rite.

His listener interrupted him here with a few questions; the clear and prompt replies to which enabled Harley to detect Levy's plausible perversion of the facts; and he vaguely guessed the cause of the usurer's falsehood, in the criminal passion which the ill-fated bride had inspired.

"Egerton," said Harley, stifling with an effort his own wrath against the vile deceiver both of wife and husband, "if, on reading those papers, you find that Leonora had more excuse for her suspicions and flight than you now deem, and discover perfidy in one to whom you trusted your secret, leave his punishment to Heaven. All that you say convinces me more and more that we cannot even see through the cloud, much less guide the thunderbolt. But proceed."

Audley looked surprised and startled, and his eye turned wistfully towards the papers; but after a short pause he continued his recital. He came to Nora's unexpected return to her father's house—her death—his conquest of his own grief, that he might spare Harley the abrupt shock of learning her decease. He had torn himself from the dead, in remorseful sympathy with the living. He spoke of Harley's illness, so nearly fatal—repeated Harley's jealous words, "that he would rather mourn Nora's death, than take comfort from the thought that she had loved another." He spoke of his journey to the village where Mr Dale had told him Nora's child was placed—"and, hearing that child and mother were alike gone, whom now could I right by acknowledging a bond that I feared would so wring your heart?" Audley again paused a moment, and resumed in short, nervous, impressive sentences. This cold, austere man of the world for the first time bared his heart—unconscious, perhaps, that he did so—unconscious that he revealed how deeply, amidst state cares and public distinctions, he had felt the absence of

affections—how mechanical was that outer circle in the folds of life which is called "a career"—how valueless wealth had grown—none to inherit it. Of his gnawing and progressive disease alone he did not speak; he was too proud and too masculine to appeal to pity for physical ills. He reminded Harley how often, how eagerly, year after year, month after month, he had urged his friend to rouse himself from mournful dreams, devote his native powers to his country, or seek the surer felicity of domestic ties. "Selfish in these attempts I might be," said Egerton; "it was only if I saw you restored to happiness that I could believe you could calmly hear my explanation of the past, and on the floor of some happy home grant me your forgiveness. I longed to confess, and I dared not. Often have the words rushed to my lips—as often some chance sentence from you repelled me. In a word, with you were so entwined all the thoughts and affections of my youth—even those that haunted the grave of Nora—that I could not bear to resign your friendship, and, surrounded by the esteem and honour of a world I cared not for, to meet the contempt of your reproachful eye."

Amidst all that Audley said—amidst all that admitted of no excuse—two predominant sentiments stood clear, in unmistakable and touching pathos. Remorseful regret for the lost Nora—and self-accusing, earnest, almost feminine tenderness for the friend he had deceived. Thus, as he continued to speak, Harley more and more forgot even the remembrance of his own guilty and terrible interval of hate; the gulf that had

so darkly yawned between the two closed up, leaving them still standing, side by side, as in their schoolboy days. But he remained silent, listening—shading his face from Audley, and as if under some soft but enthralling spell, till Egerton thus closed—

"And now, Harley, all is told. You spoke of revenge?"

"Revenge!" muttered Harley, starting.

"And believe me," continued Egerton, "were revenge in your power, I should rejoice at it as an atonement. To receive an injury in return for that which, first from youthful passion, and afterwards from the infirmity of purpose that concealed the wrong, I have inflicted upon you—why, that would soothe my conscience, and raise my lost self-esteem. The sole revenge you can bestow takes the form which most humiliates me,—to revenge is to pardon."

Harley groaned; and still hiding his face with one hand, stretched forth the other, but rather with the air of one who entreats than who accords forgiveness. Audley took and pressed the hand thus extended.

"And now, Harley, farewell. With the dawn I leave this house. I cannot now accept your aid in this election. Levy shall announce my resignation. Randal Leslie, if you so please it, may be returned in my stead. He has abilities which, under safe guidance, may serve his country; and I have no right to reject, from vain pride, whatever will promote the career of one whom I undertook, and have failed to serve."

"Ay, ay," muttered Harley; "think not of Randal Leslie; think but of your son."

"My son! But are you sure that he still lives? You smile; you—you—oh, Harley—I took from you the mother,—give to me the son; break my heart with gratitude. Your revenge is found!"

Lord L'Estrange rose with a sudden start—gazed on Audley for a moment—irresolute, not from resentment, but from shame. At that moment he was the man humbled; he was the man who feared reproach, and who needed pardon. Audley, not divining what was thus passing in Harley's breast, turned away.

"You think that I ask too much; and yet all that I can give to the child of my love and the heir of my name, is the worthless blessing of a ruined man. Harley, I say no more. I dare not add, 'You too loved his mother! and with a deeper and a nobler love than mine.'" He stopped short, and Harley flung himself on his breast.

"Me—me—pardon me, Audley! Your offence has been slight to mine. You have told me your offence; never can I name to you my own. Rejoice that we have both to exchange forgiveness, and in that exchange we are equal still, Audley—brothers still. Look up—look up; think that we are boys now as we were once—boys who have had their wild quarrel—and who, the moment it is over, feel dearer to each other than before."

"Oh, Harley, this *is* revenge! It strikes home,"

murmured Egerton,—and tears gushed fast from eyes that could have gazed unwinking on the rack. The clock struck; Harley sprang forward.

"I have time yet," he cried; "much to do and to undo. You are saved from the grasp of Levy,—your election will be won,—your fortunes in much may be restored,—you have before you honours not yet achieved,—your career, as yet, is scarce begun,—your son will embrace you to-morrow. Let me go—your hand again! Ah, Audley, we shall be so happy yet!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THERE is a hitch," said Dick, pithily, when Randal joined him in the oak copse at ten o'clock. "Life is full of hitches."

RANDAL.—"The art of life is to smoothe them away. What hitch is this, my dear Avenel?"

DICK.—"Leonard has taken huff at certain expressions of Lord L'Estrange's at the nomination to-day, and talks of retiring from the contest."

RANDAL (with secret glee).—"But his resignation would smoothe a hitch—not create one. The votes promised to him would thus be freed, and go to——"

DICK.—"The Right Honourable Red-Tapist."

RANDAL.—"Are you serious?"

DICK.—"As an undertaker! The fact is, there are two parties among the Yellows as there are in the Church—High Yellow and Low Yellow. Leonard has made great way with the High Yellows, and has more influence with them than I; and the High Yellows infinitely preferred Egerton to yourself. They say, 'Politics apart, he would be an honour to the borough.' Leonard is of the same opinion; and if he retires, I don't think I could coax either him or the Highflyers to make you any the better by his resignation."

RANDAL.—"But surely your nephew's sense of gratitude to you would induce him not to go against your wishes?"

DICK.—"Unluckily, the gratitude is all the other way. It is I who am under obligations to him—not he to me. As for Lord L'Estrange, I can't make head or tail of his real intentions; and why he should have attacked Leonard in that way, puzzles me more than all, for he wished Leonard to stand. And Levy has privately informed me that, in spite of my lord's friendship for the Right Honourable, you are the man he desires to secure."

RANDAL.—"He has certainly shown that desire throughout the whole canvass."

DICK.—"I suspect that the borough-mongers have got a seat for Egerton elsewhere; or, perhaps, should his party come in again, he is to be pitchforked into the Upper House."

RANDAL (smiling).—"Ah, Avenel, you are so shrewd; you see through everything. I will also add, that Egerton wants some short respite from public life in order to nurse his health and attend to his affairs, otherwise I could not even contemplate the chance of the electors preferring me to him, without a pang."

DICK.—"Pang!—stuff—considerable. The oak trees don't hear us! You want to come into Parliament, and no mistake. If I am the man to retire—as I always proposed, and had got Leonard to agree to, before this confounded speech of L'Estrange's—come into Parliament you will, for the Low Yellows I can

twist round my finger, provided the High Yellows will not interfere; in short, I could transfer to you votes promised to me, but I can't answer for those promised to Leonard. Levy tells me you are to marry a rich girl, and will have lots of money; so, of course, you will pay my expenses if you come in through my votes."

RANDAL.—"My dear Avenel, certainly I will."

DICK.—"And I have two private bills I want to smuggle through Parliament."

RANDAL.—"They shall be smuggled, rely on it. Mr Fairfield being on one side of the House, and I on the other, we two could prevent all unpleasant opposition. Private bills are easily managed—with that tact which I flatter myself I possess."

DICK.—"And when the bills are through the House, and you have had time to look about you, I dare say you will see that no man can go against Public Opinion, unless he wants to knock his own head against a stone wall; and that Public Opinion is decidedly Yellow."

RANDAL (with candour).—"I cannot deny that Public Opinion is Yellow; and, at my age, it is natural that I should not commit myself to the policy of a former generation. Blue is fast wearing out. But to return to Mr Fairfield—you do not speak as if you had no hope of keeping him straight to what I understand to be his agreement with yourself. Surely his honour is engaged to it?"

DICK.—"I don't know as to honour; but he has now taken a fancy to public life; at least so he said, no

later than this morning before we went into the hall; and I trust that matters will come right. Indeed, I left him with Parson Dale, who promised me that he would use all his best exertions to reconcile Leonard and my lord, and that Leonard should do nothing hastily."

RANDAL.—"But why should Mr Fairfield retire because Lord L'Estrange wounds his feelings? I am sure Mr Fairfield has wounded mine, but that does not make me think of retiring."

DICK.—"Oh, Leonard is a poet, and poets are quite as crotchety as L'Estrange said they were. And Leonard is under obligations to Lord L'Estrange, and thought that Lord L'Estrange was pleased by his standing: whereas now—in short, it is all Greek to me, except that Leonard has mounted his high horse, and if that throws him, I am afraid it will throw you. But still, I have great confidence in Parson Dale—a good fellow, who has much influence with Leonard. And though I thought it right to be above-board, and let you know where the danger lies, yet one thing I can promise—if I resign, you shall come in; so shake hands on it."

RANDAL.—"My dear Avenel! And your wish is to resign?"

DICK.—"Certainly. I should do so a little time after noon, contriving to be below Leonard on the poll. You know Emanuel Trout, the captain of the Hundred and Fifty 'Waiters on Providence,' as they are called?"

RANDAL.—"To be sure I do."

DICK.—"When Emanuel Trout comes into the booth, you will know how the election turns. As he votes, all the Hundred and Fifty will vote. Now I must go back. Good-night. You'll not forget that my expenses are to be paid. Point of honour. Still, if they are *not* paid, the election can be upset—petition for bribery and corruption; and if they *are* paid, why Lansmere may be your seat for life."

RANDAL.—"Your expenses shall be paid the moment my marriage gives me the means to pay them—and that must be very soon."

DICK.—"So Levy says. And my little jobs—the private bills?"

RANDAL.—"Consider the bills passed and the jobs done."

DICK.—"And one must not forget one's country. One must do the best one can for one's principles. Egerton is infernally Blue. You allow Public Opinion —is——"

RANDAL.—"Yellow. Not a doubt of it."

DICK.—"Good-night. Ha—ha—humbug, eh?"

RANDAL.—"Humbug! Between men like us—oh no. Good-night, my dear friend—I rely on you."

DICK.—"Yes; but mind, I promise nothing, if Leonard Fairfield does not stand."

RANDAL.—"He must stand; keep him to it. Your affairs—your business—your mill——"

DICK.—"Very true. He *must* stand. I have great faith in Parson Dale."

Randal glided back through the park. When he

came on the terrace, he suddenly encountered Lord L'Estrange. "I have just been privately into the town, my dear Lord, and heard a strange rumour, that Mr Fairfield was so annoyed by some remarks in your lordship's admirable speech, that he talks of retiring from the contest. That would give a new feature to the election, and perplex all our calculations. And I fear, in that case, there might be some secret coalition between Avenel's friends and our Committee, whom, I am told, I displeased by the moderate speech which your lordship so eloquently defended—a coalition by which Avenel would come in with Mr Egerton; whereas, if we all four stand, Mr Egerton, I presume, will be quite safe; and I certainly think I have an excellent chance."

LORD L'ESTRANGE.—"So Mr Fairfield will retire in consequence of my remarks! I am going into the town, and I intend to apologise for those remarks, and retract them.

RANDAL (joyously).—"Noble!"

Lord L'Estrange looked at Leslie's face, upon which the stars gleamed palely. "Mr Egerton has thought more of your success than of his own," said he, gravely, and hurried on.

Randal continued on the terrace. Perhaps Harley's last words gave him a twinge of compunction. His head sunk musingly on his breast, and he paced to and fro the long gravel walk, summoning up all his intellect to resist every temptation to what could injure his self-interest.

"Skulking knave!" muttered Harley. "At least there will be nothing to repent, if I can do justice on him. That is not revenge. Come, that must be fair retribution. Besides, how else can I deliver Violante?" —He laughed gaily, his heart was so light; and his foot bounded on as fleet as the deer that he startled amongst the fern.

A few yards from the turnstile, he overtook Richard Avenel, disguised in a rough greatcoat and spectacles. Nevertheless, Harley's eye detected the Yellow candidate at the first glance. He caught Dick familiarly by the arm. "Well met—I was going to you. We have the election to settle."

"On the terms I mentioned to your lordship?" said Dick, startled. "I will agree to return one of your candidates; but it must not be Audley Egerton." Harley whispered close in Avenel's ear.

Avenel uttered an exclamation of amazement. The two gentlemen walked on rapidly, and conversing with great eagerness.

"Certainly," said Avenel, at length stopping short, "one would do a great deal to serve a family connection—and a connection that does a man so much credit; and how can one go against one's own brother-in-law? —a gentleman of such high standing—pull up the whole family! How pleased Mrs Richard Avenel will be! Why the devil did not I know it before? And poor—dear—dear Nora. Ah, that she were living!" Dick's voice trembled.

"Her name will be righted; and I will explain why

it was my fault that Egerton did not before acknowledge his marriage, and claim you as a brother. Come, then, it is all fixed and settled."

"No, my lord; I am pledged the other way. I don't see how I can get off my word—to Randal Leslie. I'm not over nice, nor what is called Quixotic, but still my word is given, that if I retire from the election, I will do my best to return Leslie instead of Egerton."

"I know that through Baron Levy. But if your nephew retires?"

"Oh, that would solve all difficulties. But the poor boy has now a wish to come into Parliament; and he has done me a service in the hour of need."

"Leave it to me. And as to Randal Leslie, he shall have an occasion himself to acquit you and redeem himself; and happy, indeed, will it be for him if he has yet one spark of gratitude, or one particle of honour."

The two continued to converse for a few moments—Dick seeming to forget the election itself, and ask questions of more interest to his heart, which Harley answered so, that Dick wrung L'Estrange's hand with great emotion—and muttered, "My poor mother! I understand now why she would never talk to me of Nora. When may I tell her the truth?"

"To-morrow evening, after the election, Egerton shall embrace you all."

Dick started, and saying—"See Leonard as soon as you can—there is no time to lose," plunged into a lane that led towards the obscurer recesses of the town. Harley continued his way with the same light elastic tread

which (lost during his abnegation of his own nature) was now restored to the foot, that seemed loath to leave a print upon the mire.

At the commencement of the High Street he encountered Mr Dale and Fairfield walking slowly arm in arm.

HARLEY.—"Leonard, I was coming to you. Give me your hand. Forget for the present the words that justly stung and offended you. I will do more than apologise—I will repair the wrong. Excuse me, Mr Dale—I have one word to say in private to Leonard." —He drew Fairfield aside.

"Avenel tells me that if you were to retire from this contest, it would be a sacrifice of inclination. Is it so?"

"My lord, I have sorrows that I would fain forget; and, though I at first shrunk from the strife in which I have been since engaged, yet now a literary career seems to me to have lost its old charm; and I find that, in public life, there is a distraction to the thoughts which embitter solitude, that books fail to bestow. Therefore, if you still wish me to continue this contest, though I know not your motive, it will not be as it was to begin it—a reluctant and a painful obedience to your request."

"I understand. It was a sacrifice of inclination to begin the contest—it would be now a sacrifice of inclintion to withdraw!"

"Honestly—yes, my lord."

"I rejoice to hear it, for I ask that sacrifice; a sacri-

left all of his life not devoted to his country, 'to the charity of his friends'—how proudly, even as his opponent, I could have clasped his hand; and if he had wronged me in private life, I should have thought it ingratitude to the country he had so served, to remember the offence."

Harley turned away abruptly, and joined Mr Dale.

"Leave Leonard to go home by himself; you see that I have healed whatever wounds I inflicted on him."

PARSON.—"And your better nature thus awakened, I trust, my dear lord, that you have altogether abandoned the idea of——"

HARLEY.—"Revenge?—No. And if you do not approve that revenge to-morrow, I will never rest till I have seen you—a bishop!"

MR DALE (much shocked).—"My lord, for shame!"

HARLEY (seriously).—"My levity is but lip-deep, my dear Mr Dale. But sometimes the froth on the wave shows the change in the tide."

The Parson looked at him earnestly, and then seized him by both hands with holy gladness and affection.

"Return to the Park now," said Harley, smiling, "and tell Violante, if it be not too late to see her, that she was even more eloquent than you."

Lord L'Estrange bounded forward.

Mr Dale walked back through the park to Lansmere House. On the terrace he found Randal, who was still pacing to and fro, sometimes in the starlight, sometimes in the shadow.

Leslie looked up, and seeing Mr Dale, the close astuteness of his aspect returned; and stepping out of the starlight deep into the shadow, he said—

"I was sorry to learn that Mr Fairfield had been so hurt by Lord L'Estrange's severe allusions. Pity that political differences should interfere with private friendships; but I hear that you have been to Mr Fairfield—and, doubtless, as the peacemaker. Perhaps you met Lord L'Estrange by the way? He promised me that he would apologise and retract."

"Good young man," said the unsuspecting Parson, "he has done so."

"And Mr Leonard Fairfield will, therefore, I presume, continue the contest?"

"Contest—ah, this election! I suppose so, of course. But I grieve that he should stand against you, who seem to be disposed towards him so kindly."

"Oh," said Randal, with a benevolent smile, "we have fought before, you know, and I beat him then. I may do so again!"

And he walked into the house, arm-in-arm with the Parson. Mr Dale sought Violante—Leslie retired to his own room, and felt his election was secured.

Lord L'Estrange had gained the thick of the streets—passing groups of roaring enthusiasts—Blue and Yellow—now met with a cheer—now followed by a groan. Just by a public-house that formed the angle of a lane with the High Street, and which was all a-blaze with light, and all alive with clamour, he beheld the graceful Baron leaning against the threshold, smoking

his cigar, too refined to associate its divine vapour with the wreaths of shag within, and chatting agreeably with a knot of females, who were either attracted by the general excitement, or waiting to see husband, brother, father, or son, who were now joining in the chorus of "Blue for ever!" that rang from tap-room to attic of the illumined hostelry. Levy, seeing Lord L'Estrange, withdrew his cigar from his lips, and hastened to join him. "All the Hundred and Fifty are in there," said the Baron, with a backward significant jerk of his thumb towards the inn. "I have seen them all privately, in tens at a time; and I have been telling the ladies without, that it will be best for the interest of their families to go home, and let us lock up the Hundred and Fifty safe from the Yellows, till we bring them to the poll. But I am afraid," continued Levy, "that the rascals are not to be relied upon unless I actually pay them beforehand; and that would be disreputable, immoral—and, what is more, it would upset the election. Besides, if they are paid beforehand, query, is it quite sure how they will vote afterwards?"

"Mr Avenel, I dare say, can manage them," said Harley. "Pray do nothing immoral, and nothing that will upset the election. I think you might as well go home."

"Home! No, pardon me, my lord; there must be some head to direct the Committee, and keep our captains at their posts upon the doubtful electors. A great deal of mischief may be done between this and the morrow; and I would sit up all night—ay, six nights

a-week for the next three months—to prevent any awkward mistake by which Audley Egerton can be returned."

"His return would really grieve you so much?" said Harley.

"You may judge of that by the zeal with which I enter into all your designs."

Here there was a sudden and wondrously loud shout from another inn—a Yellow inn, far down the lane, not so luminous as the Blue hostelry; on the contrary, looking rather dark and sinister, more like a place for conspirators or felons than honest independent electors. —"Avenel for ever!—Avenel and the Yellows!"

"Excuse me, my lord, I must go back and watch over my black sheep, if I would have them blue!" said Levy; and he retreated towards the threshold. But at that shout of "Avenel for ever!" as if at a signal, various electors of the redoubted Hundred and Fifty rushed from the Blue hostelry, sweeping past Levy, and hurrying down the lane to the dark little Yellow inn, followed by the female stragglers, as small birds follow an owl. It was not, however, very easy to get into that Yellow inn. Yellow Reformers, eminent for their zeal on behalf of purity of election, were stationed outside the door, and only strained in one candidate for admittance at a time. "After all," thought the Baron, as he passed into the principal room of the Blue tavern, and proposed the national song of "Rule Britannia"— "after all, Avenel hates Egerton as much as I do, and both sides work to the same end." And thrumming

on the table, he joined, with a fine bass, in the famous line,

"For Britons never will be slaves!"

In the interim, Harley had disappeared within the "Lansmere Arms," which was the headquarters of the Blue Committee. Not, however, mounting to the room in which a few of the more indefatigable were continuing their labours, receiving reports from scouts, giving orders, laying wagers, and very muzzy with British principles and spirits, Harley called aside the landlord, and inquired if the stranger, for whom rooms had been prepared, was yet arrived. An affirmative answer was given, and Harley followed the host up a private stair, to a part of the house remote from the rooms devoted to the purposes of the election. He remained with this stranger about half an hour, and then walked into the Committee-room, got rid of the more excited, conferred with the more sober, issued a few brief directions to such of the leaders as he felt he could most rely upon, and returned home as rapidly as he had quitted it.

Dawn was grey in the skies when Harley sought his own chamber. To gain it, he passed by the door of Violante's. His heart suffused with grateful ineffable tenderness, he paused and kissed the threshold. When he stood within his room (the same that he had occupied in his early youth), he felt as if the load of years were lifted from his bosom. The joyous, divine elasticity of spirit, that in the morning of life springs towards the Future as a bird soars into heaven, pervaded

his whole sense of being. A Greek poet implies, that the height of bliss is the sudden relief of pain : there is a nobler bliss still—the rapture of the conscience at the sudden release from a guilty thought. By the bedside at which he had knelt in boyhood, Harley paused to kneel once more. The luxury of prayer, interrupted since he had nourished schemes of which his passions had blinded him to the sin, but which, nevertheless, he dared not confess to the All-Merciful, was restored to him. And yet, as he bowed his knee, the elation of spirits he had before felt forsook him. The sense of the danger his soul had escaped—the full knowledge of the guilt to which the fiend had tempted—came dread before his clearing vision; he shuddered in horror of himself. And he who but a few hours before had deemed it so impossible to pardon his fellow-man, now felt as if years of useful and beneficent deeds could alone purify his own repentant soul from the memory of one hateful passion.

CHAPTER XXXII.

But while Harley had thus occupied the hours of night with cares for the living, Audley Egerton had been in commune with the dead. He had taken from the pile of papers amidst which it had fallen, the record of Nora's silenced heart. With a sad wonder he saw how he had once been loved. What had all which successful ambition had bestowed on the lonely statesman to compensate for the glorious empire he had lost—such realms of lovely fancy; such worlds of exquisite emotion; that infinite which lies within the divine sphere that unites spiritual genius with human love? His own positive and earthly nature attained, for the first time, and as if for its own punishment, the comprehension of that loftier and more ethereal visitant from the heavens, who had once looked with a seraph's smile through the prison-bars of his iron life;—that celestial refinement of affection, that exuberance of feeling which warms into such varieties of beautiful idea, under the breath of the earth-beautifier, Imagination;—all from which, when it was all his own, he had turned half-weary and impatient, and termed the exaggerations of a visionary romance—now that the world had lost them evermore, he interpreted aright as truths. Truths they

were, although illusions. Even as the philosopher tells us that the splendour of colours which deck the universe is not on the surface whereon we think to behold it, but in our own vision; yet, take the colours from the universe, and what philosophy can assure us that the universe has sustained no loss?

But when Audley came to that passage in the fragment which, though but imperfectly, explained the true cause of Nora's flight;—when he saw how Levy, for what purpose he was unable to conjecture, had suggested to his bride the doubts that had offended him—asserted the marriage to be a fraud—drawn from Audley's own brief resentful letters to Nora, proof of the assertion—misled so naturally the young wife's scanty experience of actual life, and maddened one so sensitively pure into the conviction of dishonour—his brow darkened, and his hand clenched. He rose and went at once to Levy's room. He found it deserted—inquired—learned that Levy was gone forth, and had left word he might not be at home for the night. Fortunate, perhaps, for Audley—fortunate for the Baron—that they did not then meet. Revenge, in spite of his friend's admonition, might at that hour have been as potent an influence on Egerton as it had been on Harley, and not, as with the latter, to be turned aside.

Audley came back to his room and finished the tragic record. He traced the tremor of that beloved hand through the last tortures of doubt and despair;—he saw where the hot tears had fallen;—he saw where the hand had paused, the very sentence not concluded;—

mentally he accompanied his fated bride in the dismal journey to her maiden home, and beheld her before him as he had last seen, more beautiful even in death than the face of living woman had ever since appeared to him;—and as he bent over the last words, the blank that they left on the leaf, stretching pale beyond the quiver of the characters and the blister of the tears—pale and blank as the void which departed love leaves behind it—he felt his heart suddenly stand still, its course arrested as the record closed. It beat again, but feebly—so feebly! His breath became labour and pain, his sight grew dizzy. But the constitutional firmness and fortitude of the man clung to him in the stubborn mechanism of habit—his will yet fought against his disease—life rallied as the light flickers up in the waning taper.

The next morning, when Harley came into his friend's room, Egerton was asleep. But the sleep seemed much disturbed; the breathing was hard and difficult; the bedclothes were partially thrown off, as if in the tossing of disturbed dreams; the sinewy strong arm, the broad athletic breast, were partly bare. Strange that so deadly a disease within should leave the frame such apparent power that, to the ordinary eye, the sleeping sufferer seemed a model of healthful vigour. One hand was thrust with uneasy straining over the pillows—it had its hold on the fatal papers; a portion of the leaves was visible; and where the characters had been blurred by Nora's tears, were the traces, yet moist, of tears perhaps more bitter.

Harley felt deeply affected; and while he still stood by the bed, Egerton sighed heavily and woke. He stared round him, as if perplexed and confused—till his eyes resting on Harley, he smiled and said—

"So early! Ah—I remember, it is the day for our great boat-race. We shall have the current against us; but you and I together—when did we ever lose?"

Audley's mind was wandering; it had gone back to the old Eton days. But Harley thought that he spoke in metaphorical allusion to the present more important contest.

"True, my Audley—you and I together—when did we ever lose? But will you rise? I wish you would be at the polling-place to shake hands with your voters as they come up. By four o'clock you will be released, and the election won."

"The election! How!—what!" said Egerton, recovering himself. "I recollect now. Yes—I accept this last kindness from you. I always said I would die in harness. Public life—I have no other. Ah, I dream again! Oh, Harley!—my son—my son!"

"You shall see him after four o'clock. You will be proud of each other. But make haste and dress. Shall I ring the bell for your servant?"

"Do," said Egerton, briefly, and sinking back. Harley quitted the room, and joined Randal and some of the more important members of the Blue Committee, who were already hurrying over their breakfast.

All were anxious and nervous except Harley, who dipped his dry toast into his coffee, according to his

ordinary abstemious Italian habit, with serene composure. Randal in vain tried for an equal tranquillity. But though sure of his election, there would necessarily follow a scene trying to the nerve of his hypocrisy. He would have to affect profound chagrin in the midst of vile joy; have to act the part of decorous high-minded sorrow, that by some untoward chance—some unaccountable cross-splitting, Randal Leslie's gain should be Audley Egerton's loss. Besides, he was flurried in the expectation of seeing the Squire, and of appropriating the money which was to secure the dearest object of his ambition. Breakfast was soon despatched. The Committee-men, bustling for their hats, and looking at their watches, gave the signal for departure; yet no Squire Hazeldean had made his appearance. Harley, stepping from the window upon the terrace, beckoned to Randal, who took his hat and followed.

"Mr Leslie," said Harley, leaning against the balustrade, and carelessly patting Nero's rough honest head, "you remember that you were good enough to volunteer to me the explanation of certain circumstances in connection with the Count di Peschiera, which you gave to the Duke di Serrano; and I replied that my thoughts were at present engaged on the election, but as soon as that was over, I should be very willing to listen to any communications affecting yourself and my old friend the Duke, with which you might be pleased to favour me."

This address took Randal by surprise, and did

not tend to calm his nerves. However, he replied readily:

"Upon that, as upon any other matter that may influence the judgment you form of me, I shall be but too eager to remove a single doubt that, in your eyes, can rest upon my honour."

"You speak exceedingly well, Mr Leslie; no man can express himself more handsomely; and I will claim your promise with the less scruple, because the Duke is powerfully affected by the reluctance of his daughter to ratify the engagement that binds his honour, in case your own is indisputably cleared. I may boast of some influence over the young lady, since I assisted to save her from the infamous plot of Peschiera; and the Duke urges me to receive your explanation, in the belief that, if it satisfy me, as it has satisfied him, I may conciliate his child in favour of the addresses of a suitor who would have hazarded his very life against so redoubted a duellist as Peschiera."

"Lord L'Estrange," replied Randal, bowing, "I shall indeed owe you much if you can remove that reluctance on the part of my betrothed bride, which alone clouds my happiness, and which would at once put an end to my suit, did I not ascribe it to an imperfect knowledge of myself, which I shall devote my life to improve into confidence and affection."

"No man *can* speak more handsomely," reiterated Harley, as if with profound admiration; and indeed he did eye Randal as we eye some rare curiosity. "I am happy to inform you, too," continued L'Estrange, "that

if your marriage with the Duke of Serrano's daughter take place——"

"*If!*" echoed Randal.

"I beg pardon for making an hypothesis of what you claim the right to esteem a certainty—I correct my expression: *when* your marriage with that young lady takes place, you will at least escape the rock on which many young men of ardent affections have split at the onset of the grand voyage. You will form no imprudent connection. In a word, I received yesterday a despatch from Vienna, which contains the full pardon and formal restoration of Alphonso Duke di Serrano. And I may add that the Austrian Government (sometimes misunderstood in this country) is bound by the laws it administers, and can in no way dictate to the Duke, once restored, as to the choice of his son-in-law, or as to the heritage that may devolve on his child."

"And does the Duke yet know of his recall?" exclaimed Randal, his cheek flushed, and his eye sparkling.

"No. I reserve that good news, with other matters, till after the election is over. But Egerton keeps us waiting sadly. Ah, here comes his valet."

Audley's servant approached. "Mr Egerton feels himself rather more poorly than usual, my lord; he begs you will excuse his going with you into the town at present. He will come later if his presence is absolutely necessary."

"No. Pray tell him to rest and nurse himself. I should have liked him to witness his own triumph—

that is all. Say I will represent him at the polling-place. Gentlemen, are you ready? We will go on."

The polling-booth was erected in the centre of the market-place. The voting had already commenced; and Mr Avenel and Leonard were already at their posts, in order to salute and thank the voters in their cause who passed before them. Randal and L'Estrange entered the booth amidst loud hurrahs, and to the national air of "See the Conquering Hero comes." The voters defiled in quick succession. Those who voted entirely according to principle or colour—which came to much the same thing—and were therefore above what is termed "management," flocked in first, voting straightforwardly for both Blues or both Yellows. At the end of the first half-hour, the Yellows were about ten ahead of the Blues. Then sundry split votes began to perplex conjecture as to the result; and Randal, at the end of the first hour, had fifteen majority over Audley Egerton, two over Dick Avenel—Leonard Fairfield heading the poll by five. Randal owed his place in the lists to the voters that Harley's personal efforts had procured for him; and he was well pleased to see that Lord L'Estrange had not withdrawn from him a single promise so obtained. This augured well for Harley's ready belief in his appointed "explanations." In short, the whole election seemed going just as he had calculated. But by twelve o'clock, there were some changes in the relative position of the candidates.—Dick Avenel had gradually gained ground, passing Randal—passing even Leonard. He stood at the

head of the poll by a majority of ten. Randal came next. Audley was twenty behind Randal, and Leonard four behind Audley.

More than half the constituency had polled, but none of the Committee on either side, nor one of the redoubted corps of a Hundred and Fifty.

The poll now slackened sensibly. Randal, looking round, and longing for an opportunity to ask Dick whether he really meant to return himself instead of his nephew, saw that Harley had disappeared; and presently a note was brought to him requesting his presence in the Committee-room. Thither he hastened.

As he forced his way through the bystanders in the lobby, towards the threshold of the room, Levy caught hold of him and whispered—"They begin to fear for Egerton. They want a compromise in order to secure him. They will propose to you to resign, if Avenel will withdraw Leonard. Don't be entrapped. L'Estrange may put the question to you; but—a word in your ear—he would be glad enough to throw over Egerton. Rely upon this, and stand firm."

Randal made no answer, but, the crowd giving way for him, entered the room. Levy followed. The doors were instantly closed. All the Blue Committee were assembled. They looked heated, anxious, eager. Lord L'Estrange, alone calm and cool, stood at the head of the long table. Despite his composure, Harley's brow was thoughtful. "Yes," said he to himself, "I will give this young man the fair occasion to prove gratitude to his benefactor; and if he here acquit himself,

I will spare him at least public exposure of his deceit to others. So young, he must have some good in him —at least towards the man to whom he owes all."

"Mr Leslie," said L'Estrange, aloud, "you see the state of the poll. Our Committee believe that, if you continue to stand, Egerton must be beaten. They fear that, Leonard Fairfield having little chance, the Yellows will not waste their second votes on him, but will transfer them to you, in order to keep out Egerton. If you retire, Egerton will be safe. There is reason to suppose that Leonard would, in that case, also be withdrawn."

"You can hope and fear nothing more from Egerton," whispered Levy. "He is utterly ruined; and, if he lose, will sleep in a prison. The bailiffs are waiting for him."

Randal was still silent, and at that silence an indignant murmur ran through the more influential members of the Committee. For, though Audley was not personally very popular, still a candidate so eminent was necessarily their first object, and they would seem very small to the Yellows if their great man was defeated by the very candidate introduced to aid him—a youth unknown. Vanity and patriotism both swelled that murmur. "You see, young sir," cried a rich blunt master-butcher, "that it was an honourable understanding that Mr Egerton was to be safe. You had no claim on us, except as fighting second to him. And we are all astonished that you don't say at once, 'Save Egerton of course.' Excuse my freedom, sir. No time for palaver."

"Lord L'Estrange," said Randal, turning mildly from the butcher, "do you, as the first here in rank and influence, and as Mr Egerton's especial friend, call upon me to sacrifice my election, and what appear to be the inclinations of the majority of the constituents, in order to obtain what is, after all, a doubtful chance of returning Mr Egerton in my room?"

"I do not call upon you, Mr Leslie. It is a matter of feeling or of honour, which a gentleman can very well decide for himself."

"Was any such compact made between your lordship and myself, when you first gave me your interest and canvassed for me in person?"

"Certainly not. Gentlemen, be silent. No such compact was mentioned by me."

"Neither was it by Mr Egerton. Whatever might be the understanding spoken of by the respected elector who addressed me, I was no party to it. I am persuaded that Mr Egerton is the last person who would wish to owe his election to a trick upon the electors in the midst of the polling, and to what the world would consider a very unhandsome treatment of myself, upon whom all the toil of the canvass has devolved."

Again the murmur rose; but Randal had an air so determined, that it quelled resentment, and obtained a continued, though most chilling and half-contemptuous hearing.

"Nevertheless," resumed Randal, "I would at once retire, were I not under the firm persuasion that I shall

convince all present, who now seem to condemn me, that I act precisely according to Mr Egerton's own private inclinations. That gentleman, in fact, has never been amongst you—has not canvassed in person—has taken no trouble, beyond a speech, that was evidently meant to be but a general defence of his past political career. What does this mean? Simply that his standing has been merely a form, to comply with the wish of his party, against his own desire."

The Committee-men looked at each other amazed and doubtful. Randal saw he had gained an advantage; he pursued it with a tact and ability which showed that, in spite of his mere oratorical deficiencies, he had in him the elements of a dexterous debater. "I will be plain with you, gentlemen. My character, my desire to stand well with you all, oblige me to be so. Mr Egerton does not wish to come into Parliament at present. His health is much broken; his private affairs need all his time and attention. I am, I may say, as a son to him. He is most anxious for my success; Lord L'Estrange told me but last night, very truly, 'more anxious for my success than his own.' Nothing could please him more than to think I were serving in Parliament, however humbly, those great interests which neither health nor leisure will, in this momentous crisis, allow himself to defend with his wonted energy. Later, indeed, no doubt, he will seek return to an arena in which he is so distinguished; and when the popular excitement, which produces the popular injustice of the day, is over, what constituency

will not be proud to return such a man? In support and proof of what I have thus said, I now appeal to Mr Egerton's own agent—a gentleman who, in spite of his vast fortune and the rank he holds in society, has consented to act gratuitously on behalf of that great statesman. I ask you, then, respectfully, Baron Levy—is not Mr Egerton's health much broken, and in need of rest?"

"It is," said Levy.

"And do not his affairs necessitate his serious and undivided attention?"

"They do, indeed," quoth the Baron. "Gentlemen, I have nothing to urge in behalf of my distinguished friend as against the statement of his adopted son, Mr Leslie."

"Then all I can say," cried the butcher, striking his huge fist on the table, "is, that Mr Egerton has behaved d——d unhandsome to us, and we shall be the laughing-stock of the borough."

"Softly, softly," said Harley. "There is a knock at the door behind. Excuse me."

Harley quitted the room, but only for a minute or two. On his return he addressed himself to Randal.

"Are we then to understand, Mr Leslie, that your intention is not to resign?"

"Unless your Lordship actually urge me to the contrary, I should say, 'Let the election go on, and all take our chance.' That seems to me the fair, manly, ENGLISH (great emphasis on the last adjective), honourable course."

"Be it so," replied Harley; "'let all take their chance.' Mr Leslie, we will no longer detain you. Go back to the polling-place—one of the candidates should be present: and you, Baron Levy, be good enough to go also, and return thanks to those who may yet vote for Mr Egerton."

Levy bowed, and went out arm-in-arm with Randal.

"Capital, capital," said the Baron. "You have a wonderful head."

"I did not like L'Estrange's look, nevertheless. But he can't hurt me now; the votes he got for me instead of for Egerton have already polled. The Committee, indeed, may refuse to vote for me; but then there is Avenel's body of reserve. Yes, the election is virtually over. When we get back, Hazeldean will have arrived with the money for the purchase of my ancestral property;—Dr Riccabocca is already restored to the estates and titles of Serrano;—what do I care farther for Lord L'Estrange? Still, I do not like his look."

"Pooh, you have done just what he wished. I am forbidden to say more. Here we are at the booth. A new placard since we left. How are the numbers? Avenel forty ahead of you; you thirty above Egerton; and Leonard Fairfield still last on the poll. But where are Avenel and Fairfield?"

Both these candidates had disappeared, perhaps gone to their own Committee-room.

Meanwhile, as soon as the doors had closed on Randal and the Baron, in the midst of the angry hubbub succeeding to their departure, Lord L'Estrange sprang

upon the table. The action and his look stilled every sound.

"Gentlemen, it is in our hands to return one of our candidates, and to make our own choice between the two. You have heard Mr Leslie and Baron Levy. To their statement I make but this reply—Mr Egerton is needed by the country; and whatever his health or his affairs, he is ready to respond to that call. If he has not canvassed—if he does not appear before you at this moment, the services of more than twenty years plead for him in his stead. Which, then, of the two candidates do you choose as your member—a renowned statesman, or a beardless boy? Both have ambition and ability;—the one has identified those qualities with the history of a country, and (as it is now alleged to his prejudice) with a devotion that has broken a vigorous frame and injured a princely fortune. The other evinces his ambition by inviting you to prefer him to his benefactor; and proves his ability by the excuses he makes for ingratitude. Choose between the two—an Egerton or a Leslie."

"Egerton for ever!" cried all the assembly, as with a single voice, followed by a hiss for Leslie.

"But," said a grave and prudent Committee-man, "have we really the choice?—Does not that rest with the Yellows? Is not your lordship too sanguine?"

"Open that door behind; a deputation from our opponents waits in the room on the other side of the passage. Admit them."

The Committee were hushed in breathless silence

while Harley's order was obeyed. And soon, to their great surprise, Leonard Fairfield himself, attended by six of the principal members of the Yellow party, entered the room.

LORD L'ESTRANGE.—"You have a proposition to make to us, Mr Fairfield, on behalf of yourself and Mr Avenel, and with the approval of your committee?"

LEONARD (advancing to the table).—"I have. We are convinced that neither party can carry both its candidates. Mr Avenel is safe. The only question is, which of the two candidates on your side it best becomes the honour of this constituency to select. My resignation, which I am about to tender, will free sufficient votes to give the triumph either to Mr Egerton or to Mr Leslie."

"Egerton for ever!" cried once more the excited Blues.

"Yes—Egerton for ever!" said Leonard, with a glow upon his cheek. "We may differ from his politics, but who can tell us those of Mr Leslie? We may differ from the politician, but who would not feel proud of the senator? A great and incalculable advantage is bestowed on that constituency which returns to Parliament a distinguished man. His distinction ennobles the place he represents—it sustains public spirit—it augments the manly interest in all that affects the nation. Every time his voice hushes the assembled Parliament, it reminds us of our common country; and even the discussion amongst his constituents which his voice provokes—clears their perceptions of the public

interest, and enlightens themselves, from the intellect which commands their interest, and compels their attention. Egerton, then, for ever! If our party must subscribe to the return of one opponent, let all unite to select the worthiest. My Lord L'Estrange, when I quit this room, it will be to announce my resignation, and to solicit those who have promised me their votes to transfer them to Mr Audley Egerton."

Amidst the uproarious huzzas which followed this speech, Leonard drew near to Harley! "My Lord, I have obeyed your wishes, as conveyed to me by my uncle, who is engaged at this moment elsewhere in carrying them into effect."

"Leonard," said Harley, in the same undertone, "you have insured to Audley Egerton what you alone could do—the triumph over a perfidious dependent—the continuance of the sole career in which he has hitherto found the solace or the zest of life. He must thank you with his own lips. Come to the Park after the close of the poll. There and then shall the explanations yet needful to both be given and received."

Here Harley bowed to the assembly, and raised his voice: "Gentlemen, yesterday, at the nomination of the candidates, I uttered remarks that have justly pained Mr Fairfield. In your presence I wholly retract and frankly apologise for them. In your presence I entreat his forgiveness, and say, that if he will accord me his friendship, I will place him in my esteem and affection side by side with the statesman whom he has given to his country."

Leonard grasped the hand extended to him with both his own, and then, overcome by his emotions, hurried from the room; while Blues and Yellows exchanged greetings, rejoiced in the compromise that would dispel all party irritation, secure the peace of the borough, and allow quiet men, who had detested each other the day before, and vowed reciprocal injuries to trade and custom, the indulgence of all amiable and fraternal feelings—until the next general election.

In the meanwhile, the polling had gone on slowly as before, but still to the advantage of Randal. "Not two-thirds of the constituency will poll," murmured Levy, looking at his watch. "The thing is decided. Aha, Audley Egerton! you who once tortured me with the unspeakable jealousy that bequeaths such implacable hate—you who scorned my society, and called me 'scoundrel'—disdainful of the very power your folly placed within my hands—aha, your time is up!—and the spirit that administered to your own destruction strides within the circle to seize its prey."

"You shall have my first frank, Levy," said Randal, "to enclose your letter to Mr Thornhill's solicitor. This affair of the election is over; we must now look to what else rests on our hands?"

"What the devil is that placard?" cried Levy, turning pale.

Randal looked, and right up the market-place, followed by an immense throng, moved, high over the

heads of all, a Yellow Board that seemed marching through the air, comet-like :—

Two o'clock, p. m.

RESIGNATION OF FAIRFIELD!

YELLOWS!

VOTE FOR

AVENEL AND EGERTON!

(Signed) TIMOTHY ALLJACK.

Yellow Committee Room.

"What infernal treachery is this?" cried Randal, livid with honest indignation.

"Wait a moment; there is Avenel!" exclaimed Levy; and at the head of another procession that emerged from the obscurer lanes of the town, walked, with grave majesty, the surviving Yellow candidate. Dick disappeared for a moment, within a grocer's shop in the broadest part of the place, and then culminated, at the height of a balcony on the first story, just above an enormous yellow canister, significant of the profession and the politics of the householder. No sooner did Dick, hat in hand, appear on this rostrum, than the two processions halted below, bands ceased, flags drooped round their staves, crowds rushed within hearing, and even the poll-clerks sprang from the booth. Randal and Levy themselves pressed into

the throng. Dick on the balcony was the *Deus ex Machinâ*.

"Freemen and electors!" said Dick, with his most sonorous accents—"finding that the public opinion of this independent and enlightened constituency is so evenly divided, that only one Yellow candidate can be returned, and only one Blue has a chance, it was my intention last night to retire from the contest, and thus put an end to all bickerings and ill blood—(Hold your tongues there, can't you!)—I say honestly, I should have preferred the return of my distinguished and talented young nephew—honourable relation—to my own; but he would not hear of it; and talked all our Committee into the erroneous but high-minded notion, that the town would cry shame if the nephew rode into Parliament by breaking the back of the uncle." (Loud cheers from the mob, and partial cries of "We'll have you both!")

"You'll do no such thing, and you know it; hold your jaw," resumed Dick, with imperious good-humour. "Let me go on, can't you?—time presses. In a word, my nephew resolved to retire, if, at two o'clock this day, there was no chance of returning both of us; and there is none. Now, then, the next thing for the Yellows, who have not yet voted, is to consider how they will give their second votes. If I had been the man to retire, why, for certain reasons, I should have recommended them to split with Leslie—a clever chap, and pretty considerable sharp."

"Hear, hear, hear!" cried the Baron, lustily.

"But I'm bound to say that my nephew has an opinion of his own—as an independent Britisher, let him be twice your nephew, ought to have; and his opinion goes the other way, and so does that of our Committee."

"Sold!" cried the Baron; and some of the crowd shook their heads, and looked grave—especially those suspected of a wish to be bought.

"Sold!—pretty fellow you, with the nose-gay in your button-hole, to talk of selling! You who wanted to sell your own client—and you know it." (Levy recoiled.) "Why, gentlemen, that's Levy, the Jew, who talks of selling! And if he asperses the character of this constituency, I stand here to defend it: and there stands the parish pump, with a handle for the arm of Honesty, and a spout for the lips of Falsehood!"

At the close of this magniloquent period, borrowed, no doubt, from some great American orator, Baron Levy involuntarily retreated towards the shelter of the polling-booth, followed by some frowning Yellows, with very menacing gestures.

"But the calumniator sneaks away; leave him to the reproach of his conscience," resumed Dick, with a generous magnanimity.

"SOLD!" (the word rang through the place like the blast of a trumpet)—"Sold! No, believe me, not a man who votes for Egerton instead of Fairfield will, so far as I am concerned, be a penny the better" (chilling silence)—"or" (with a scarce perceivable wink towards

the anxious faces of the Hundred and Fifty who filled the background)—"or a penny the worse." (Loud cheers from the Hundred and Fifty, and cries of "Noble!") "I don't like the politics of Mr Egerton. But I am not only a politician—I am a MAN! The arguments of our respected Committee—persons in business, tender husbands, and devoted fathers—have weight with me. I myself am a husband and a father. If a needless contest be prolonged to the last, with all the irritations it engenders, who suffer?—why, the tradesman and the operative. Partiality, loss of custom, tyrannical demands for house-rent, notices to quit—in a word, the screw!"

"Hear, hear!" and "Give us the Ballot!"

"The Ballot—with all my heart, if I had it about me! And if we had the Ballot, I should like to see a man dare to vote Blue." (Loud cheers from the Yellows.) "But, as we have not got it, we must think of our families. And I may add, that though Mr Egerton may come again into office, yet" (added Dick, solemnly) "I will do my best, as his colleague, to keep him straight; and your own enlightenment (for the schoolmaster is abroad) will show him that no minister can brave public opinion, nor quarrel with his own bread and butter." (Much cheering.) "In these times the aristocracy must endear themselves to the middle and working class; and a member in office has much to give away in the Stamps and Excise, in the Customs, the Post Office, and other State departments in this rotten old—I mean this magnificent empire—by which he can benefit his

constituents, and reconcile the prerogatives of aristocracy with the claims of the people—more especially in this case, the people of the borough of Lansmere." (Hear, hear.)

"And therefore, sacrificing party inclinations (since it seems that I can in no way promote them) on the Altar of General Good Feeling, I cannot oppose the resignation of my nephew—honourable relation—nor blind my eyes to the advantages that may result to a borough so important to the nation at large, if the electors think fit to choose my Right Honourable broth—I mean the Right Honourable Blue candidate —as my brother colleague. Not that I presume to dictate, or express a wish one way or the other,—only, as a Family Man, I say to you, Electors and Freemen, having served your country in returning me, you have nobly won the right to think of the little ones at home."

Dick put his hand to his heart, bowed gracefully, and retired from the balcony amidst unanimous applause.

In three minutes more Dick had resumed his place in the booth, in his quality of candidate. A rush of Yellow electors poured in, hot and fast. Up came Emanuel Trout, and, in a firm voice, recorded his vote —"Avenel and Egerton." Every man of the Hundred and Fifty so polled. To each question, "Whom do you vote for?" "Avenel and Egerton" knelled on the ears of Randal Leslie with "damnable iteration." The young man folded his arms across his breast in

dogged despair. Levy had to shake hands for Mr Egerton, with a rapidity that took away his breath. He longed to slink away—longed to get at L'Estrange, whom he supposed would be as wroth at this turn in the wheel of fortune as himself. But how, as Egerton's representative, escape from the continuous gripes of those horny hands? Besides, there stood the parish pump, right in face of the booth, and some huge truculent-looking Yellows loitered round it, as if ready to pounce on him the instant he quitted his present sanctuary. Suddenly the crowd round the booth receded—Lord L'Estrange's carriage drove up to the spot, and Harley, stepping from it, assisted out of the vehicle an old grey-haired, paralytic man. The old man stared round him, and nodded smilingly to the mob. "I'm here—I'm come; I'm but a poor creature, but I'm a good Blue to the last!"

"Old John Avenel—fine old John!" cried many a voice.

And John Avenel, still leaning on Harley's arm, tottered into the booth, and plumped for "Egerton."

"Shake hands, father," said Dick, bending forward, "though you'll not vote for me."

"I was a Blue before you were born, answered the old man, tremulously. "But I wish you success all the same, and God bless you, my boy!"

Even the poll-clerks were touched: and when Dick, leaving his place, was seen by the crowd assisting Lord L'Estrange to place poor John again in the carriage—that picture of family love in the midst of political

difference—of the prosperous, wealthy, energetic son, who, as a boy, had played at marbles in the very kennel, and who had risen in life by his own exertions, and was now virtually M.P. for his native town—tending on the broken-down, aged father, whom even the interests of a son he was so proud of could not win from the colours which he associated with truth and rectitude—had such an effect upon the rudest of the mob there present, that you might have heard a pin fall—till the carriage drove away back to John's humble home, and then there rose such a tempest of huzzas! John Avenel's vote for Egerton gave another turn to the vicissitudes of that memorable election. As yet Avenel had been ahead of Audley; but a plumper in favour of Egerton, from Avenel's own father, set an example and gave an excuse to many a Blue who had not yet voted, and could not prevail on himself to split his vote between Dick and Audley; and therefore, several leading tradesmen, who, seeing that Egerton was safe, had previously resolved not to vote at all, came up in the last hour, plumped for Egerton, and carried him to the head of the poll; so that poor John, whose vote, involving that of Mark Fairfield, had secured the first opening in public life to the young ambition of the unknown son-in-law, still contributed to connect with success and triumph, but also with sorrow, and, it may be, with death, the names of the high-born Egerton and the humble Avenel.

The great town-clock strikes the hour of four; the returning-officer declares the poll closed; the formal

announcement of the result will be made later. But all the town knows that Audley Egerton and Richard Avenel are the members for Lansmere. And flags stream, and drums beat, and men shake each other by the hand heartily; and there is talk of the chairing to-morrow; and the public-houses are crowded; and there is an indistinct hubbub in street and alley, with sudden bursts of uproarious shouting; and the clouds to the west look red and lurid round the sun, which has gone down behind the church-tower—behind the yew-trees that overshadow the quiet grave of Nora Avenel.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AMIDST the darkening shadows of twilight, Randal Leslie walked through Lansmere Park towards the house. He had slunk away before the poll was closed —crept through by-lanes, and plunged into the leafless copses of the Earl's stately pasture-grounds. Amidst the bewilderment of his thoughts—at a loss to conjecture how this strange mischance had befallen him—inclined to ascribe it to Leonard's influence over Avenel —but suspecting Harley, and half doubtful of Baron Levy, he sought to ascertain what fault of judgment he himself had committed—what wile he had forgotten—what thread in his web he had left ragged and incomplete. He could discover none. His ability seemed to him unimpeachable—*totus, teres, atque rotundus.* And then there came across his breast a sharp pang—sharper than that of baffled ambition—the feeling that he had been deceived, and bubbled, and betrayed. For so vital a necessity to all living men is TRUTH, that the vilest traitor feels amazed and wronged—feels the pillars of the world shaken, when treason recoils on himself. "That Richard Avenel, whom I trusted, could so deceive me!" murmured Randal, and his lip quivered.

He was still in the midst of the Park, when a man with a yellow cockade in his hat, and running fast from the direction of the town, overtook him with a letter, on delivering which the messenger, waiting for no answer, hastened back the way he had come. Randal recognised Avenel's hand on the address—broke the seal, and read as follows:—

"(*Private and Confidential.*)

"DEAR LESLIE,—Don't be down-hearted—you will know to-night or to-morrow why I have had cause to alter my opinion as to the Right Honourable; and you will see that I could not, as a Family Man, act otherwise than I have done. Though I have not broken my word to you—for you remember that all the help I promised was dependent on my own resignation, and would go for nothing if Leonard resigned instead—yet I feel you must think yourself rather bamboozled. But I have been obliged to sacrifice you, from a sense of Family Duty, as you will soon acknowledge. My own nephew is sacrificed also; and I have sacrificed my own concerns, which require the whole man of me for the next year or two at Screwstown. So we are all in the same boat, though you may think you are set adrift by yourself. But I don't mean to stay in Parliament. I shall take the Chiltern Hundreds, pretty considerable soon. And if you keep well with the Blues, I'll do my best with the Yellows to let you walk over the course in my stead. For I don't think Leonard will want to

stand again. And so a word to the wise—and you may yet be member for Lansmere.

"R. A."

In this letter, Randal, despite all his acuteness, could not detect the honest compunction of the writer. He could at first only look at the worst side of human nature, and fancy that it was a paltry attempt to stifle his just anger and insure his discretion. But, on second thoughts, it struck him that Dick might very naturally be glad to be released to his mill, and get a *quid pro quo* out of Randal, under the comprehensive title—"repayment of expenses." Perhaps Dick was not sorry to wait until Randal's marriage gave him the means to make the repayment. Nay, perhaps Randal had been thrown over for the present, in order to wring from him better terms in a single election. Thus reasoning, he took comfort from his belief in the mercenary motives of another. True, it might be but a short disappointment. Before the next Parliament was a month old, he might yet take his seat in it as member for Lansmere. But all would depend on his marriage with the heiress; he must hasten that.

Meanwhile, it was necessary to knit and gather up all his thought, courage, and presence of mind. How he shrunk from return to Lansmere House—from facing Egerton, Harley—all. But there was no choice. He would have to make it up with the Blues—to defend the course he had adopted in the Committee-room.

There, no doubt, was Squire Hazeldean awaiting him with the purchase-money for the lands of Rood—there was the Duke di Serrano, restored to wealth and honour—there was his promised bride, the great heiress, on whom depended all that could raise the needy gentleman into wealth and position. Gradually, with the elastic temper that is essential to a systematic schemer, Randal Leslie plucked himself from the pain of brooding over a plot that was defeated, to prepare himself for consummating those that yet seemed so near success.—After all, should he fail in regaining Egerton's favour, Egerton was of use no more. He might rear his head, and face out what some might call "ingratitude," provided he could but satisfy the Blue Committee. Dull dogs, how could he fail to do that! He could easily talk over the Machiavellian sage. He should have small difficulty in explaining all to the content of Audley's distant brother, the Squire. Harley alone—but Levy had so positively assured him that Harley was not sincerely anxious for Egerton; and as to the more important explanation relative to Peschiera, surely what had satisfied Violante's father ought to satisfy a man who had no peculiar right to demand explanations at all; and if these explanations did not satisfy, the onus to disprove them must rest with Harley; and who or what could contradict Randal's plausible assertions—assertions in support of which he himself could summon a witness, in Baron Levy. Thus nerving himself to all that could task his powers, Randal Leslie crossed the

threshold of Lansmere House, and in the hall he found the Baron awaiting him.

"I can't account," said Levy, "for what has gone so cross in this confounded election. It is L'Estrange that puzzles me; but I know that he hates Egerton. I know that he will prove that hate by one mode of revenge, if he has lost it in another.—But it is well, Randal, that you are secure of Hazeldean's money and the rich heiress's hand; otherwise——"

"Otherwise, what?"

"I should wash my hands of you, *mon cher;* for, in spite of all your cleverness, and all I have tried to do for you, somehow or other I begin to suspect that your talents will never secure your fortune. A carpenter's son beats you in public speaking, and a vulgar mill-owner tricks you in private negotiation. Decidedly, as yet, Randal Leslie, you are—a failure. And, as you so admirably said, 'a man from whom we have nothing to hope or fear, we must blot out of the map of the future.'"

Randal's answer was cut short by the appearance of the groom of the chambers.

"My lord is in the saloon, and requests you and Mr Leslie will do him the honour to join him there." The two gentlemen followed the servant up the broad stairs.

The saloon formed the centre room of the suite of apartments. From its size, it was rarely used save on state occasions. It had the chilly and formal aspect of rooms reserved for ceremony.

Riccabocca, Violante, Helen, Mr Dale, Squire Hazeldean, and Lord L'Estrange, were grouped together by the cold Florentine marble table, not littered with books and female work, and the endearing signs of habitation, that give a living smile to the face of home; nothing thereon save a great silver candelabrum, that scarce lighted the spacious room, and brought out the portraits on the walls as a part of the assembly, looking, as portraits do look, with searching, curious eyes upon every eye that turns to them.

But as soon as Randal entered, the Squire detached himself from the group, and, coming to the defeated candidate, shook hands with him heartily.

"Cheer up, my boy; 'tis no shame to be beaten. Lord L'Estrange says you did your best to win, and man can do no more. And I'm glad, Leslie, that we don't meet for our little business till the election is over; for after annoyance, something pleasant is twice as acceptable. I've the money in my pocket. Hush—and I say, my dear, dear, dear boy, I cannot find out where Frank is; but it is really all off with that foreign woman—eh?"

"Yes, indeed, sir, I hope so. I'll talk to you about it when we can be alone. We may slip away presently, I trust."

"I'll tell you a secret scheme of mine and Harry's," said the Squire, in a still low whisper. "We must drive that marchioness, or whatever she is, out of the boy's head, and put a pretty English girl into it instead. That will settle him in life too. And I must try and swallow that bitter pill of the *post-obit*. Harry makes

worse of it than I do, and is so hard on the poor fellow that I've been obliged to take his part. I've no idea of being under petticoat government—it is not the way with the Hazeldeans. Well, but to come back to the point—whom do you think I mean by the pretty girl?"

"Miss Sticktorights?"

"Zounds, no!—your own little sister, Randal. Sweet pretty face! Harry liked her from the first, and then you'll be Frank's brother, and your sound head and good heart will keep him right. And as you are going to be married too (you must tell me all about that later), why, we shall have two marriages, perhaps, in the family on the same day."

Randal's hand grasped the Squire's, and with an emotion of human gratitude—for we know that, hard to all else, he had natural feelings for his fallen family; and his neglected sister was the one being on earth whom he might almost be said to love. With all his intellectual disdain for honest simple Frank, he knew no one in the world with whom his young sister could be more secure and happy. Transferred to the roof, and improved by the active kindness, of Mrs Hazeldean—blest in the manly affection of one not too refined to censure her own deficiencies of education—what more could he ask for his sister, as he pictured her to himself, with her hair hanging over her ears, and her mind running into seed over some trashy novel. But before he could reply, Violante's father came to add his own philosophical consolations to the Squire's downright comfortings.

"Who could ever count on popular caprice? The wise of all ages had despised it. In that respect, Horace and Machiavelli were of the same mind," &c. &c. "But," said the Duke, with emphatic kindness, "perhaps your very misfortune here may serve you elsewhere. The female heart is prone to pity, and ever eager to comfort. Besides, if I am recalled to Italy, you will have leisure to come with us, and see the land where, of all others, ambition can be most readily forgotten, even," added the Italian, with a sigh, "even by her own sons!"

Thus addressed by both Hazeldean and the Duke, Randal recovered his spirits. It was clear that Lord L'Estrange had not conveyed to them any unfavourable impression of his conduct in the Committee-room. While Randal had been thus engaged, Levy had made his way to Harley, who retreated with the Baron into the bay of the great window.

"Well, my lord, do you comprehend this conduct on the part of Richard Avenel? He secure Egerton's return!—he!"

"What so natural, Baron Levy—his own brother-in-law?"

The Baron started, and turned very pale.

"But how did he know that? I never told him. I meant indeed——"

"Meant, perhaps, to shame Egerton's pride at the last, by publicly declaring his marriage with a shopkeeper's daughter. A very good revenge still left to you; but revenge for what? A word with you, now,

Baron, that our acquaintance is about to close for ever. You know why I have cause for resentment against Egerton. I do but suspect yours; will you make it clear to me?"

"My lord, my lord," faltered Baron Levy, "I, too, wooed Nora Avenel as my wife; I, too, had a happier rival in the haughty worldling who did not appreciate his own felicity; I, too—in a word, some women inspire an affection that mingles with the entire being of a man, and is fused with all the currents of his life-blood; Nora Avenel was one of those women."

Harley was startled. This burst of emotion from a man so corrupt and cynical arrested even the scorn he felt for the usurer. Levy soon recovered himself. "But our revenge is not baffled yet. Egerton, if not already in my power, is still in yours. His election may save him from arrest, but the law has other modes of public exposure and effectual ruin."

"For the knave, yes—as I intimated to you in your own house—you who boast of your love to Nora Avenel, and know in your heart that you were her destroyer—you who witnessed her marriage, and yet dared to tell her that she was dishonoured!"

"My lord—I—how could you know—I mean, how think that—that——" faltered Levy, aghast.

"Nora Avenel has spoken from her grave," replied Harley, solemnly. "Learn that, wherever man commits a crime, Heaven finds a witness!"

"It is on me, then," said Levy, wrestling against a superstitious thrill at his heart—"on me that you now

concentre your vengeance; and I must meet it as I may. But I have fulfilled my part of our compact. I have obeyed you implicitly—and——"

"I will fulfil my part of our bond, and leave you undisturbed in your wealth."

"I knew I might trust to your lordship's honour," exclaimed the usurer, in servile glee.

"And this vile creature nursed the same passions as myself; and but yesterday we were partners in the same purpose, and influenced by the same thought," muttered Harley to himself. "Yes," he said aloud, "I dare not, Baron Levy, constitute myself your judge. Pursue your own path—all roads meet at last before the common tribunal. But you are not yet released from our compact; you must do some good in spite of yourself. Look yonder, where Randal Leslie stands, smiling secure, between the two dangers he has raised up for himself. And as Randal Leslie himself has invited me to be his judge, and you are aware that he cited yourself this very day as his witness, here I must expose the guilty—for here the innocent still live, and need defence."

Harley turned away, and took his place by the table. "I have wished," said he, raising his voice, "to connect with the triumph of my earliest and dearest friend the happiness of others in whose welfare I feel an interest. To you, Alphonso, Duke of Serrano, I now give this despatch, received last evening by a special messenger from the Prince Von ——, announcing your restoration to your lands and honours."

The Squire stared with open mouth. "Rickeybockey a duke? Why, Jemima's a duchess! Bless me, she is actually crying!" And his good heart prompted him to run to his cousin and cheer her up a bit.

Violante glanced at Harley, and flung herself on her father's breast. Randal involuntarily rose, and moved to the Duke's chair.

"And you, Mr Randal Leslie," continued Harley, "though you have lost your election, see before you at this moment such prospects of wealth and happiness, that I shall only have to offer you congratulations to which those that greet Mr Audley Egerton may well appear lukewarm and insipid, provided you prove that you have not forfeited the right to claim that promise which the Duke di Serrano has accorded to the suitor of his daughter's hand. Some doubts resting on my mind, you have volunteered to dispel them. I have the duke's permission to address to you a few questions, and I now avail myself of your offer to reply to them."

"Now—and here, my lord?" said Randal, glancing round the room, as if deprecating the presence of so many witnesses.

"Now—and here. Nor are those present so strange to your explanations as your question would imply. Mr Hazeldean, it so happens that much of what I shall say to Mr Leslie concerns your son."

Randal's countenance fell. An uneasy tremor now seized him.

"My son!—Frank? Oh then, of course, Randal will speak out. Speak, my boy!"

Randal remained silent. The Duke looked at his working face, and drew away his chair.

"Young man, can you hesitate?" said he. "A doubt is expressed which involves your honour."

"'Sdeath!" cried the Squire, also gazing on Randal's cowering eye and quivering lip—"What are you afraid of?"

"Afraid!" said Randal, forced into speech, and with a hollow laugh—"afraid?—I? What of? I was only wondering what Lord L'Estrange could mean."

"I will dispel that wonder at once. Mr Hazeldean, your son displeased you first by his proposals of marriage to the Marchesa di Negra against your consent; secondly, by a *post-obit* bond granted to Baron Levy. Did you understand from Mr Randal Leslie that he had opposed or favoured the said marriage—that he had countenanced or blamed the said *post-obit?*"

"Why, of course," cried the Squire, "that he had opposed both the one and the other."

"Is it so, Mr Leslie?"

"My lord—I—I—my affection for Frank, and my esteem for his respected father—I—I—" He nerved himself, and went on with firm voice: "Of course, I did all I could to dissuade Frank from the marriage; and as to the *post-obit*, I know nothing about it."

"So much at present for this matter. I pass on to the graver one, that affects your engagement with the Duke di Serrano's daughter. I understand from you, Duke, that to save your daughter from the snares of Count di Peschiera, and in the belief that Mr Leslie

shared in your dread of the Count's designs, you, while in exile and in poverty, promised to that gentleman your daughter's hand? When the probabilities of restoration to your principalities seemed well-nigh certain, you confirmed that promise on learning from Mr Leslie that he had, however ineffectively, struggled to preserve your heiress from a perfidious snare. Is it not so?"

"Certainly. Had I succeeded to a throne, I could not recall the promise that I had given in penury and banishment—I could not refuse to him who would have sacrificed worldly ambition in wedding a penniless bride, the reward of his own generosity. My daughter subscribes to my views."

Violante trembled, and her hands were locked together; but her gaze was fixed on Harley.

Mr Dale wiped his eyes, and thought of the poor refugee feeding on minnows, and preserving himself from debt amongst the shades of the Casino.

"Your answer becomes you, Duke," resumed Harley. "But should it be proved that Mr Leslie, instead of wooing the Princess for herself, actually calculated on the receipt of money for transferring her to Count Peschiera—instead of saving her from the dangers you dreaded, actually suggested the snare from which she was delivered—would you still deem your honour engaged to——"

"Such a villain! No, surely not!" exclaimed the Duke. "But this is a groundless hypothesis! Speak, Randal."

"Lord L'Estrange cannot insult me by deeming it otherwise than a groundless hypothesis," said Randal, striving to rear his head.

"I understand, then, Mr Leslie, that you scornfully reject such a supposition?"

"Scornfully—yes. And," continued Randal, advancing a step, "since the supposition has been made, I demand from Lord L'Estrange, as his equal (for all gentlemen are equals where honour is to be defended at the cost of life), either instant retractation or instant proof."

"That's the first word you have spoken like a man," cried the Squire. "I have stood my ground myself for a less cause. I have had a ball through my right shoulder."

"Your demand is just," said Harley, unmoved. "I cannot give the retractation—I will produce the proof."

He rose and rang the bell;—the servant entered, received his whispered order, and retired. There was a pause painful to all. Randal, however, ran over in his fearful mind what evidence could be brought against him—and foresaw none. The folding-doors of the saloon were thrown open, and the servant announced—

THE COUNT DI PESCHIERA.

A bombshell descending through the roof could not have produced a more startling sensation. Erect, bold, with all the imposing effect of his form and bearing, the Count strode into the centre of the ring; and, after a slight bend of haughty courtesy, which compre-

hended all present, reared up his lofty head, and looked round, with calm in his eye and a curve on his lip—the self-assured, magnificent, high-bred Daredevil.

"Duke di Serrano," said the Count, in English, turning towards his astounded kinsman, and in a voice that, slow, clear, and firm, seemed to fill the room, "I returned to England on the receipt of a letter from my Lord L'Estrange, and with a view, it is true, of claiming at his hands the satisfaction which men of our birth accord to each other, where affront, from what cause soever, has been given or received. Nay, fair kinswoman"—and the Count, with a slight but grave smile, bowed to Violante, who had uttered a faint cry—"that intention is abandoned. If I have adopted too lightly the old courtly maxim, that 'all stratagems are fair in love,' I am bound also to yield to my Lord L'Estrange's arguments, that the counter-stratagems must be fair also. And, after all, it becomes me better to laugh at my own sorry figure in defeat, than to confess myself gravely mortified by an ingenuity more successful than my own." The Count paused, and his eye lightened with sinister fire, which ill suited the raillery of his tone, and the polished ease of his bearing. "*Ma foi!*" he continued, "it is permitted me to speak thus, since at least I have given proofs of my indifference to danger, and my good fortune when exposed to it. Within the last six years I have had the honour to fight nine duels, and the regret to wound five, and dismiss from the world four, as gallant and worthy gentlemen as ever the sun shone upon."

"Monster!" faltered the Parson.

The Squire stared aghast, and mechanically rubbed the shoulder which had been lacerated by Captain Dashmore's bullet. Randal's pale face grew yet more pale, and the eye he had fixed upon the Count's hardy visage quailed and fell.

"But," resumed the Count, with a graceful wave of the hand, "I have to thank my Lord L'Estrange for reminding me that a man whose courage is above suspicion is privileged not only to apologise, if he has injured another, but to accompany apology with atonement. Duke of Serrano, it is for that purpose that I am here. My lord, you have signified your wish to ask me some questions of serious import as regards the Duke and his daughter—I will answer them without reserve."

"*Monsieur le Comte*," said Harley, "availing myself of your courtesy, I presume to inquire who informed you that this young lady was a guest under my father's roof?"

"My informant stands yonder—Mr Randal Leslie. And I call upon Baron Levy to confirm my statement."

"It is true," said the Baron, slowly, and as if overmastered by the tone and mien of an imperious chieftain.

There came a low sound like a hiss from Randal's livid lips.

"And was Mr Leslie acquainted with your project for securing the person and hand of your young kinswoman?"

"Certainly—and Baron Levy knows it." The Baron

bowed assent. "Permit me to add—for it is due to a lady nearly related to myself—that it was, as I have since learned, certain erroneous representations made to her by Mr Leslie which alone induced that lady, after my own arguments had failed, to lend her aid to a project which otherwise she would have condemned as strongly as, Duke di Serrano, I now with unfeigned sincerity do myself condemn it."

There was about the Count, as he thus spoke, so much of that personal dignity which, whether natural or artificial, imposes for the moment upon human judgment—a dignity so supported by the singular advantages of his superb stature, his handsome countenance, his patrician air, that the Duke, moved by his good heart, extended his hand to the perfidious kinsman, and forgot all the Machiavellian wisdom which should have told him how little a man of the Count's hardened profligacy was likely to be influenced by any purer motives, whether to frank confession or to manly repentance. The Count took the hand thus extended to him, and bowed his face, perhaps to conceal the smile which would have betrayed his secret soul. Randal still remained mute, and pale as death. His tongue clove to his mouth. He felt that all present were shrinking from his side. At last, with a violent effort, he faltered out, in broken sentences—

"A charge so sudden may well—may well confound me. But—but—who can credit it? Both the law and common sense presuppose some motive for a criminal

action; what could be my motive here? I—myself the suitor for the hand of the Duke's daughter—*I* betray her! Absurd—absurd. Duke—Duke, I put it to your own knowledge of mankind—who ever goes thus against his own interest—and—and his own heart?"

This appeal, however feebly made, was not without effect on the philosopher. "That is true," said the Duke, dropping his kinsman's hand; "I see no motive."

"Perhaps," said Harley, "Baron Levy may here enlighten us. Do you know of any motive of self-interest that could have actuated Mr Leslie in assisting the Count's schemes?"

Levy hesitated. The Count took up the word. "*Pardieu!*" said he, in his clear tone of determination and will—"*Pardieu!* I can have no doubt thrown on my assertion, least of all by those who know of its truth; and I call upon you, Baron Levy, to state whether, in case of my marriage with the Duke's daughter, I had not agreed to present my sister with a sum, to which she alleged some ancient claim, and which would have passed through your hands?"

"Certainly, that is true," said the Baron.

"And would Mr Leslie have benefited by any portion of that sum?"

Levy paused again.

"Speak, sir," said the Count, frowning.

"The fact is," said the Baron, "that Mr Leslie was anxious to complete a purchase of certain estates that had once belonged to his family, and that the Count's marriage with the Signora, and his sister's marriage

with Mr Hazeldean, would have enabled me to accommodate Mr Leslie with a loan to effect that purchase."

"What! what!" exclaimed the Squire, hastily buttoning his breast-pocket with one hand, while he seized Randal's arm with the other—"my son's marriage! You lent yourself to that, too? Don't look so like a lashed hound! Speak out like a man, if man you be!"

"Lent himself to that, my good sir!" said the Count. "Do you suppose that the Marchesa di Negra could have condescended to an alliance with a Mr Hazeldean?"

"Condescended!—a Hazeldean of Hazeldean!" exclaimed the Squire, turning fiercely, and half-choked with indignation.

"Unless," continued the Count, imperturbably, "she had been compelled by circumstances to do that said Mr Hazeldean the honour to accept a pecuniary accommodation, which she had no other mode to discharge. And here, sir, the family of Hazeldean, I am bound to say, owe a great debt of gratitude to Mr Leslie; for it was he who most forcibly represented to her the necessity for this *mésalliance;* and it was he, I believe, who suggested to my friend the Baron the mode by which Mr Hazeldean was best enabled to afford the accommodation my sister deigned to accept."

"Mode!—the *post-obit!*" ejaculated the Squire, relinquishing his hold of Randal, to lay his gripe upon Levy.

The Baron shrugged his shoulders. "Any friend of Mr Frank Hazeldean's would have recommended the same, as the most economical mode of raising money."

Parson Dale, who had at first been more shocked than any one present at these gradual revelations of Randal's treachery, now turning his eyes towards the young man, was so seized with commiseration at the sight of Randal's face, that he laid his hand on Harley's arm, and whispered him—"Look, look at that countenance!—and one so young! Spare him, spare him!"

"Mr Leslie," said Harley, in softened tones, "believe me that nothing short of justice to the Duke di Serrano —justice even to my young friend Mr Hazeldean, has compelled me to this painful duty. Here let all inquiry terminate."

"And," said the Count, with exquisite blandness, "since I have been informed by my Lord L'Estrange, that Mr Leslie has represented as a serious act on his part, that personal challenge to myself which I understood was but a pleasant and amicable arrangement in our baffled scheme—let me assure Mr Leslie, that if he be not satisfied with the regret that I now express for the leading share I have taken in these disclosures, I am wholly at Mr Leslie's service."

"Peace, homicide," cried the Parson, shuddering; and he glided to the side of the detected sinner, from whom all else had recoiled in loathing.

Craft against craft, talent against talent, treason against treason—in all this Randal Leslie would have risen superior to Giulio di Peschiera. But what now crushed him was not the superior intellect—it was the sheer brute power of audacity and nerve. Here stood the careless, unblushing villain, making light of his

guilt, carrying it away from disgust itself, with resolute look and front erect. There stood the abler, subtler, profounder criminal—cowering, abject, pitiful; the power of mere intellectual knowledge shivered into pieces against the brazen metal with which the accident of constitution often arms some ignobler nature.

The contrast was striking, and implied that truth so universally felt, yet so little acknowledged in actual life, that men with audacity and force of character can subdue and paralyse those far superior to themselves in ability and intelligence. It was these qualities which made Peschiera Randal's master; nay, the very physical attributes of the Count, his very voice and form, his bold front and unshrinking eye, overpowered the acuter mind of the refining schemer, as in a popular assembly some burly Cleon cows into timorous silence every dissentient sage. But Randal turned in sullen impatience from the Parson's whisper, that breathed comfort or urged repentance; and at length said, with clearer tones than he had yet mustered—

"It is not a personal conflict with the Count di Peschiera that can vindicate my honour; and I disdain to defend myself against the accusations of a usurer, and of a man who——"

"*Monsieur!*" said the Count, drawing himself up.

"A man who," persisted Randal, though he trembled visibly, "by his own confession, was himself guilty of all the schemes in which he would represent me as his accomplice, and who now, not clearing himself, would yet convict another——"

"*Cher petit Monsieur!*" said the Count, with his grand air of disdain, "when men like me make use of men like you, we reward them for a service, if rendered, or discard them if the service be not done; and if I condescend to confess and apologise for any act I have committed, surely Mr Randal Leslie might do the same without disparagement to his dignity. But I should never, sir, have taken the trouble to appear against you, had you not, as I learn, pretended to the hand of the lady whom I had hoped, with less presumption, to call my bride; and in this, how can I tell that you have not tricked and betrayed me? Is there anything in our past acquaintance that warrants me to believe that, instead of serving me, you sought but to serve yourself? Be that as it may, I had but one mode of repairing to the head of my house the wrongs I have done him—and that was by saving his daughter from a derogatory alliance with an impostor who had abetted my schemes for hire, and who now would filch for himself their fruit."

"Duke!" exclaimed Randal.

The Duke turned his back. Randal extended his hands to the Squire. "Mr Hazeldean—what? you, too, condemn me, and unheard?"

"Unheard!—zounds, no! If you have anything to say, speak truth, and shame the devil."

"I abet Frank's marriage!—I sanction the *post-obit!*—Oh!" cried Randal, clinging to a straw, "If Frank himself were but here!"

Harley's compassion vanished before this sustained hypocrisy.

"You wish for the presence of Frank Hazeldean. It is just." Harley opened the door of the inner room, and Frank appeared at the entrance.

"My son—my son!" cried the Squire, rushing forward, and clasping Frank to his broad fatherly breast.

This affecting incident gave a sudden change to the feelings of the audience, and for a moment Randal himself was forgotten. The young man seized that moment. Reprieved, as it were, from the glare of contemptuous accusing eyes—slowly he crept to the door, slowly and noiselessly, as the viper, when it is wounded, drops its crest, and glides writhing through the grass. Levy followed him to the threshold, and whispered in his ear—

"I could not help it—you would have done the same by me. You see you have failed in everything; and when a man fails completely, we both agreed that we must give him up altogether."

Randal said not a word, and the Baron marked his shadow fall on the broad stairs, stealing down, down, step after step, till it faded from the stones.

"But he was of some use," muttered Levy. "His treachery and his exposure will gall the childless Egerton. Some little revenge still!"

The Count touched the arm of the musing usurer—

"*J'ai bien joué mon rôle, n'est ce pas?*"—(I have well played my part, have I not?)

"Your part! Ah! but, my dear Count, I do not quite understand it."

"*Ma foi*—you are passably dull. I had just been landed in France, when a letter from L'Estrange reached me. It was couched as an invitation, which I interpreted to—the *duello*. Such invitations I never refuse. I replied. I came hither—took my lodgings at an inn. My lord seeks me last night. I begin in the tone you may suppose. *Pardieu!* he is clever, *milord!* He shows me a letter from the Prince Von ——, Alphonso's recall, my own banishment. He places before me, but with admirable suavity, the option of beggary and ruin, or an honourable claim on Alphonso's gratitude. And as for that *petit Monsieur*, do you think I could quietly contemplate my own tool's enjoyment of all I had lost myself? Nay, more, if that young Harpagon were Alphonso's son-in-law, could the Duke have a whisperer at his ear more fatal to my own interests? To be brief, I saw at a glance my best course. I have adopted it. The difficulty was to extricate myself as became a man '*de sang et de feu*.' If I have done so, congratulate me. Alphonso has taken my hand, and I now leave it to him—to attend to my fortunes, and clear up my repute."

"If you are going to London," said Levy, "my carriage, ere this, must be at the door, and I shall be proud to offer you a seat, and converse with you on your prospects. But, *peste! mon cher*, your fall has been from a great height, and any other man would have broken his bones."

"Strength is ever light," said the Count, smiling; "and it does not fall; it leaps down and rebounds."

Levy looked at the Count, and blamed himself for having disparaged Peschiera and overrated Randal.

While this conference went on, Harley was by Violante's side.

"I have kept my promise to you," said he, with a kind of tender humility. "Are you still so severe on me?"

"Ah!" answered Violante, gazing on his noble brow, with all a woman's pride in her eloquent, admiring eyes —"I have heard from Mr Dale that you have achieved a conquest over yourself, which makes me ashamed to think that I presumed to doubt how your heart would speak when a moment of wrath (though of wrath so just) had passed away."

"No, Violante—do not acquit me yet; witness my revenge (for I have not foregone it), and then let my heart speak, and breathe its prayer that the angel voice, which it now beats to hear, may still be its guardian monitor."

"What is this?" cried an amazed voice; and Harley, turning round, saw that the Duke was by his side; and, glancing with ludicrous surprise, now to Harley, now to Violante, "Am I to understand that you——"

"Have freed you from one suitor for this dear hand, to become, myself, your petitioner!"

"*Corpo di Bacco!*" cried the sage, almost embracing Harley, "this, indeed, is joyful news. But I must not again make a rash pledge—not again force my

child's inclinations. And Violante, you see, is running away."

The Duke stretched out his arm and detained his child. He drew her to his breast, and whispered in her ear. Violante blushed crimson, and rested her head on his shoulder. Harley eagerly pressed forward.

"There," said the Duke, joining Harley's hand with his daughter's—"I don't think I shall hear much more of the convent; but anything of this sort I never suspected. If there be a language in the world for which there is no lexicon nor grammar, it is that which a woman thinks in, but never speaks."

"It is all that is left of the language spoken in Paradise," said Harley.

"In the dialogue between Eve and the serpent—yes," quoth the incorrigible sage. "But who comes here?—our friend Leonard."

Leonard now entered the room; but Harley could scarcely greet him, before he was interrupted by the Count.

"*Milord*," said Peschiera, beckoning him aside, "I have fulfilled my promise, and I will now leave your roof. Baron Levy returns to London, and offers me a seat in his carriage, which is already, I believe, at your door. The Duke and his daughter will readily forgive me, if I do not ceremoniously bid them farewell. In our altered positions, it does not become me too intrusively to claim kindred; it became me only to remove, as I trust I have done, a barrier against the claim. If you approve my conduct, you will state your own

opinion to the Duke." With a profound salutation, the Count turned to depart; nor did Harley attempt to stay him, but attended him down the stairs with polite formality.

"Remember only, my Lord, that I solicit nothing. I may allow myself to accept. *Voilà tout.*" He bowed again, with the inimitable grace of the old *régime*, and stepped into the Baron's travelling-carriage.

Levy, who had lingered behind, paused to accost L'Estrange.

"Your lordship will explain to Mr Egerton how his adopted son deserved his esteem, and repaid his kindness. For the rest, though you have bought up the more pressing and immediate demands on Mr Egerton, I fear that even your fortune will not enable you to clear those liabilities, which will leave him, perhaps, a pauper!"

"Baron Levy," said Harley, abruptly, "If I have forgiven Mr Egerton, cannot you too forgive? Me he has wronged—you have wronged him, and more foully."

"No, my lord, I cannot forgive him. You he has never humiliated—you he has never employed for his wants, and scorned as his companion. You have never known what it is to start in life with one whose fortunes were equal to your own, whose talents were not superior. Look you, Lord L'Estrange—in spite of this difference between me and Egerton, that he has squandered the wealth that he gained without effort, while I have converted the follies of others into my own ample revenues—the spendthrift in his penury has the respect

and position which millions cannot bestow upon me. You would say that I am a usurer, and he is a statesman. But do you know what I should have been, had I not been born the natural son of a peer? Can you guess what I should have been, if Nora Avenel had been my wife? The blot on my birth, and the blight on my youth—and the knowledge that he who was rising every year into the rank which entitled him to reject me as a guest at his table—he whom the world called the model of a gentleman—was a coward and a liar to the friend of his youth: all this made me look on the world with contempt; and, despising Audley Egerton, I yet hated him and envied. You, whom he wronged, stretch your hand as before to the great statesman; from my touch you would shrink as pollution. My lord, you may forgive him whom you love and pity; I cannot forgive him whom I scorn and envy. Pardon my prolixity. I now quit your house."

The Baron moved a step—then turning back, said with a withering sneer—

"But you will tell Mr Egerton how I helped to expose the son he adopted! I thought of the childless man when your lordship imagined I was but in fear of your threats. Ha! ha!—that will sting."

The Baron gnashed his teeth as, hastily entering the carriage, he drew down the blinds. The post-boys cracked their whips, and the wheels rolled away.

"Who can judge," thought Harley, "through what modes retribution comes home to the breast? That man is chastised in his wealth—ever gnawed by desire

for what his wealth cannot buy!" He roused himself, cleared his brow, as from a thought that darkened and troubled; and, entering the saloon, laid his hand upon Leonard's shoulder, and looked, rejoicing, into the poet's mild, honest, lustrous eyes. "Leonard," said he, gently, "your hour is come at last."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AUDLEY EGERTON was alone in his apartment. A heavy sleep had come over him, shortly after Harley and Randal had left the house in the early morning; and that sleep continued till late in the day. All the while the town of Lansmere had been distracted in his cause—all the while so many tumultuous passions had run riot in the contest that was to close or reopen, for the statesman's ambition, the Janus gates of political war—the object of so many fears and hopes, schemes and counter-schemes, had slumbered quietly as an infant in the cradle. He woke but in time to receive Harley's despatch, announcing the success of his election; and adding, "Before the night you shall embrace your son. Do not join us below when I return. Keep calm—*we* will come to you."

In fact, though not aware of the dread nature of Audley's complaint, with its warning symptoms, Lord L'Estrange wished to spare to his friend the scene of Randal's exposure.

On the receipt of that letter, Egerton rose. At the prospect of seeing his son—Nora's son—the very memory of his disease vanished. The poor, weary,

over-laboured heart indeed beat loud, and with many a jerk and spasm. He heeded it not. The victory, that restored him to the sole life for which he had hitherto cared to live, was clean forgotten. Nature claimed her own—claimed it in scorn of death, and in oblivion of renown.

There sat the man, dressed with his habitual precision; the black coat, buttoned across the broad breast; his countenance, so mechanically habituated to self-control, still revealing little of emotion, though the sickly flush came and went on the bronzed cheek, and the eye watched the hand of the clock, and the ear hungered for a foot-tread along the corridor. At length the sound was heard—steps—many steps. He sprung to his feet—he stood on the hearth. Was the hearth to be solitary no more? Harley entered first. Egerton's eyes rested on him eagerly for a moment, and strained onward across the threshold. Leonard came next—Leonard Fairfield, whom he had seen as his opponent! He began to suspect—to conjecture—to see the mother's tender eyes in the son's manly face. Involuntarily he opened his arms; but, Leonard remaining still, let them fall with a deep sigh, and fancied himself deceived.

"Friend," said Harley, "I give to you a son proved in adversity, and who has fought his own way to fame. Leonard, in the man to whom I prayed you to sacrifice your own ambition,—of whom you have spoken with such worthy praise,—whose career of honour you have promoted,—and whose life, unsatisfied by those hon-

ours, you will soothe with your filial love—behold the husband of Nora Avenel! Kneel to your father! O Audley, embrace your son!"

"Here—here," exclaimed Egerton, as Leonard bent his knee—"here to my heart!—Look at me with those eyes!—kindly, forgivingly: they are your mother's!" His proud head sunk on his son's shoulder.

"But this is not enough," said Harley, leading Helen, and placing her by Leonard's side; "you must open your heart for more. Take into its folds my sweet ward and daughter. What is a home without the smile of woman? They have loved each other from children. Audley, yours be the hand to join—yours be the lips to bless."

Leonard started anxiously. "Oh, sir!—oh, my father!—this generous sacrifice may not be; for he—he who has saved me for this surpassing joy—he too loves her!"

"Nay, Leonard," said Harley, smiling, "I am not so neglectful of myself. Another home woos you, Audley. He whom you long so vainly sought to reconcile to life, exchanging mournful dreams for happy duties—he, too, presents you to his bride. Love her for my sake—for your own. She it is, not I, who presides over this hallowed reunion. But for her, I should have been a blinded, vindictive, guilty, repentant man; and ——" Violante's soft hand was on his lips.

"Thus," said the Parson, with mild solemnity, "Man finds that the Saviour's precepts, 'Let not the sun go down upon thy wrath,' and 'Love one another,' are

clues that conduct us through the labyrinth of human life, when the schemes of fraud and hate snap asunder, and leave us lost amidst the maze."

Egerton reared his head, as if to answer; and all present were struck and appalled by the sudden change that had come over his countenance. There was a film upon the eye—a shadow on the aspect; the words failed his lips—he sunk on the seat beside him. The left hand rested droopingly upon the piles of public papers and official documents, and the fingers played with them, as the bed-ridden dying sufferer plays with the coverlid he will soon exchange for the winding-sheet. But his right hand seemed to feel, as through the dark, for the recovered son; and having touched what it sought, feebly drew Leonard near and nearer. Alas! that blissful PRIVATE LIFE—that close centre round the core of being in the individual man—so long missed and pined for—slipped from him, as it were, the moment it reappeared; hurried away, as the circle on the ocean, which is scarce seen ere it vanishes amidst infinity. Suddenly both hands were still; the head fell back. Joy had burst asunder the last ligaments, so fretted away in unrevealing sorrow. Afar, their sound borne into that room, the joy-bells were pealing triumph; mobs roaring out huzzas; the weak cry of John Avenel might be blent in those shouts, as the drunken zealots reeled by his cottage-door, and startled the screaming ravens that wheeled round the hollow oak. The boom which he sent from the waves on the surface of life,

while the deeps are so noiseless in their march, was wafted on the wintry air into the chamber of the statesman it honoured, and over the grass sighing low upon Nora's grave. But there was one in the chamber, as in the grave, for whom the boom on the wave had no sound, and the march of the deep had no tide. Amidst promises of home, and union, and peace, and fame, Death strode into the household ring, and, seating itself, calm and still, looked lifelike ; warm hearts throbbing round it ; lofty hopes fluttering upward ; Love kneeling at its feet ; Religion, with lifted finger, standing by its side.

FINAL CHAPTER.

SCENE—*The Hall in the Old Tower of* CAPTAIN ROLAND DE CAXTON.

"BUT you have not done?" said Augustine Caxton.

PISISTRATUS.—"What remains to do?"

MR CAXTON.—"What!—why the *Final Chapter!*—the last news you can give us of those whom you have introduced to our liking or dislike."

PISISTRATUS.—"Surely it is more dramatic to close the work with a scene that completes the main design of the plot, and leave it to the prophetic imagination of all whose flattering curiosity is still not wholly satisfied, to trace the streams of each several existence, when they branch off again from the lake in which their waters converge, and by which the sibyl has confirmed and made clear the decree, that 'Conduct is Fate.'"

MR CAXTON.—"More dramatic, I grant; but you have not written a drama. A novelist should be a comfortable, garrulous, communicative, gossiping fortune-teller; not a grim, laconical, oracular sibyl. I like a novel that adopts all the old-fashioned customs prescribed to its art by the rules of the Masters, more

especially a novel which you style 'My Novel,' *par* emphasis."

CAPTAIN ROLAND.—"A most vague and impracticable title, 'My Novel.' It must really be changed before the work goes in due form to the public."

MR SQUILLS.—"Certainly the present title cannot be even pronounced by many without inflicting a shock upon their nervous system. Do you think, for instance, that my friend Lady Priscilla Graves—who is a great novel-reader, indeed, but holds all female writers unfeminine deserters to the standard of Man—could ever come out with, 'Pray, sir, have you had time to look at—MY NOVEL?' She would rather die first. And yet to be silent altogether on the latest acquisition to the circulating-libraries, would bring on a functional derangement of her ladyship's organs of speech. Or how could pretty Miss Dulcet—all sentiment, it is true, but all bashful timidity—appal Captain Smirke from proposing, with, 'Did you not think the Parson's sermon a little too dry in MY NOVEL?' It will require a face of brass, or at least a long course of citrate of iron, before a respectable lady or unassuming young gentleman, with a proper dread of being taken for scribblers, could electrify a social circle with, 'The reviewers don't do justice to the excellent things in—MY NOVEL.'"

CAPTAIN ROLAND.—"Awful consequences, indeed, may arise from the mistakes such a title gives rise to.—Counsellor Digwell, for instance—a lawyer of literary tastes, but whose career at the bar was long delayed by an unjust suspicion amongst the attorneys that he had

written a 'Philosophical Essay'—imagine such a man excusing himself for being late at a dinner of big-wigs, with 'I could not get away from—My Novel.' It would be his professional ruin! I am not fond of lawyers in general, but still I would not be a party to taking the bread out of the mouth of those with a family; and Digwell has children—the tenth an innocent baby in arms."

Mr Caxton.—"As to Digwell in particular, and lawyers in general, they are too accustomed to circumlocution, to expose themselves to the danger your kind heart apprehends; but I allow that a shy scholar like myself, or a grave college tutor, might be a little put to the blush if he were to blurt forth inadvertently with—'Don't waste your time over trash like—My Novel.' And that thought presents to us another and more pleasing view of this critical question. The title you condemn places the work under universal protection. Lives there a man or a woman so dead to self-love as to say, 'What contemptible stuff is—My Novel?' Would he or she not rather be impelled by that strong impulse of an honourable and virtuous heart, which moves us to stand as well as we can with our friends, to say, 'Allow that there is really a good thing now and then in—My Novel.' Moreover, as a novel aspires to embrace most of the interests or the passions that agitate mankind—to generalise, as it were, the details of life that come home to us all—so, in reality, the title denotes that, if it be such as the author may not unworthily call his Novel, it must also be such as the reader, whoever he

be, may appropriate in part to himself, representing his own ideas—expressing his own experience—reflecting, if not in full, at least in profile, his own personal identity. Thus, when we glance at the looking-glass in another man's room, our likeness for the moment appropriates the mirror; and according to the humour in which we are, or the state of our spirits and health, we say to ourselves, 'Bilious and yellow!—I might as well take care of my diet!' Or, 'Well, I've half a mind to propose to dear Jane; I'm not such an ill-looking dog as I thought for!' Still, whatever result from that glance at the mirror, we never doubt that 'tis our likeness we see; and each says to the phantom reflection, 'Thou art myself,' though the mere article of furniture that gives the reflection belongs to another. It is my likeness if it be his glass. And a narrative that is true to the Varieties of Life is Every Man's Novel, no matter from what shores, by what rivers, by what bays, in what pits, were extracted the sands and the silex, the pearl-ash, the nitre and quicksilver, which form its materials: no matter who the craftsman who fashioned its form; no matter who the vendor that sold, or the customer who bought; still, if I but recognised some trait of myself, 'tis my likeness that makes it 'My Novel.'"

Mr Squills (puzzled, and therefore admiring).—"Subtle, sir—very subtle. Fine organ of Comparison in Mr Caxton's head, and much called into play this evening."

Mr Caxton (benignly).—"Finally, the author, by

this most admirable and much-signifying title, dispenses with all necessity of preface. He need insinuate no merits—he need extenuate no faults; for, by calling his work thus curtly 'My Novel,' he doth delicately imply that it is no use wasting talk about faults or merits."

Pisistratus (amazed).—"How is that, sir?"

Mr Caxton.—"What so clear? You imply that, though a better novel may be written by others, you do not expect to write a novel, to which, taken as a novel, you would more decisively and unblushingly prefix that voucher of personal authorship and identity conveyed in the monosyllable 'My.' And if you have written your best, let it be ever so bad, what can any man of candour and integrity require more from you? Perhaps you will say that, if you had lived two thousand years ago, you might have called it *The Novel*, or the *Golden* Novel, as Lucius calls his story 'The Ass;' and Apuleius, to distinguish his own more elaborate Ass from all Asses preceding it, called his tale 'The Golden Ass.' But living in the present day, such a designation—implying a merit in general, not the partial and limited merit corresponding only with your individual abilities—would be presumptuous and offensive. True—I here anticipate the observation I see Squills is about to make——"

Squills.—"I, sir?"

Mr Caxton.—"You would say that, as Scarron called his work of fiction 'The Comic Novel,' so Pisistratus might have called his 'The Serious Novel,' or 'The

Tragic Novel.' But, Squills, that title would not have been inviting nor appropriate, and would have been exposed to comparison with Scarron, who being dead is inimitable. Wherefore—to put the question on the irrefragable basis of mathematics—wherefore as A B, 'My Novel,' is not equal to B C, 'The Golden Novel,' nor to D E, 'The Serious or Tragic Novel,' it follows that A B, 'My Novel,' is equal to P C, 'Pisistratus Caxton,' and P C, 'Pisistratus Caxton,' must therefore be just equal, neither more nor less, to A B, 'My Novel,' —which was to be demonstrated." (My father looked round triumphantly, and observing that Squills was dumb-founded, and the rest of his audience posed, he added mildly)—

"And so now, *non quieta movere*, proceed with the Final Chapter, and tell us first what became of that youthful Giles Overreach, who was himself his own Marrall?"

"Ay!" said the Captain, "what became of Randal Leslie? Did he repent and reform?"

"Nay," quoth my father, with a mournful shake of the head, "you can regulate the warm tide of wild passion—you can light into virtue the dark errors of ignorance; but where the force of the brain does but clog the free action of the heart—where you have to deal, not with ignorance misled, but intelligence corrupted—small hope of reform; for reform here will need reorganisation. I have somewhere read (perhaps in Hebrew tradition) that of the two orders of fallen spirits—the Angels of Love, and the Angels of Knowledge—the

first missed the stars they had lost, and wandered back through the darkness, one by one into heaven; but the last, lighted on by their own lurid splendours, said, 'Wherever *we* go, there is heaven!' And deeper and lower descending, lost their shape and their nature, till, deformed and obscene, the bottomless pit closed around them."

MR SQUILLS.—"I should not have thought, Mr Caxton, that a book-man like you would be thus severe upon Knowledge."

MR CAXTON (in wrath).—"Severe upon Knowledge! O Squills—Squills—Squills! Knowledge perverted, is knowledge no longer. Vinegar, which, exposed to the sun, breeds small serpents, or at best slimy eels, not comestible, once was wine. If I say to my grandchildren, 'Don't drink that sour stuff, which the sun itself fills with reptiles;' does that prove me a foe to sound sherry? Squills, if you had but received a scholastic education, you would know the wise maxim that saith, 'All things the worst are corruptions from things originally designed as the best.' Has not freedom bred anarchy, and religion fanaticism? And if I blame Marat calling for blood, or Dominic racking a heretic, am I severe on the religion that canonised Francis de Sales, or the freedom that immortalised Thrasybulus?"

Mr Squills, dreading a catalogue of all the saints in the calendar, and an epitome of ancient history, exclaimed eagerly,—"Enough, sir—I am convinced!"

MR CAXTON.—"Moreover, I have thought it a natu-

ral stroke of art in Pisistratus, to keep Randal Leslie, in his progress towards the rot of the intellect unwholesomely refined, free from all the salutary influences that deter ambition from settling into egotism. Neither in his slovenly home, nor from his classic tutor at his preparatory school, does he seem to have learned any truths, religious or moral, that might give sap to fresh shoots, when the first rank growth was cut down by the knife; and I especially noted, as illustrative of Egerton, no less than of Randal, that though the statesman's occasional hints of advice to his *protégé* are worldly-wise in their way, and suggestive of honour as befitting the creed of a gentleman, they are not such as much influence a shrewd reasoner like Randal, whom the example of the playground at Eton had not served to correct of the arid self-seeking which looked to knowledge for no object but power. A man tempted by passions like Audley, or seduced into fraud by a cold subtle spirit like Leslie, will find poor defence in the elegant precept, 'Remember to act as a gentleman.' Such moral embroidery adds a beautiful scarf to one's armour; but it is not the armour itself! Ten o'clock —as I live —— Push on, Pisistratus! and finish the chapter."

MRS CAXTON (benevolently).—"Don't hurry. Begin with that odious Randal Leslie, to oblige your father; but there are others whom Blanche and I care much more to hear about."

Pisistratus, since there is no help for it, produces a supplementary manuscript, which proves that, whatever

his doubt as to the artistic effect of a Final Chapter, he had foreseen that his audience would not be contented without one.

Randal Leslie, late at noon the day after he quitted Lansmere Park, arrived on foot at his father's house. He had walked all the way, and through the solitudes of the winter night; but he was not sensible of fatigue till the dismal home closed round him, with its air of hopeless ignoble poverty; and then he sunk upon the floor, feeling himself a ruin amidst the ruins. He made no disclosure of what had passed to his relations. Miserable man, there was not one to whom he could confide, or from whom he might hear the truths that connect repentance with consolation! After some weeks passed in sullen and almost unbroken silence, he left as abruptly as he had appeared, and returned to London. The sudden death of a man like Egerton had, even in those excited times, created intense, though brief sensation. The particulars of the election, that had been given in detail in the provincial papers, were copied into the London journals;—among those details, Randal Leslie's conduct in the committee-room, with many an indignant comment on selfishness and ingratitude. The political world of all parties formed one of those judgments on the great man's poor dependant, which fix a stain upon the character, and place a barrier in the career, of ambitious youth. The important personages who had once noticed Randal for Audley's sake, and who, on their subsequent and not

long-deferred restoration to power, could have made his fortune, passed him in the streets without a nod. He did not venture to remind Avenel of the promise to aid him in another election for Lansmere, nor dream of filling up the vacancy which Egerton's death had created. He was too shrewd not to see that all hope of that borough was over; he would have been hooted in the streets, and pelted from the hustings. Forlorn in the vast metropolis, as Leonard had once been, in his turn he loitered on the bridge, and gazed on the remorseless river. He had neither money nor connections—nothing save talents and knowledge to force his way back into the lofty world in which all had smiled on him before; and talents and knowledge that had been exerted to injure a benefactor, made him but the more despised. But even now, Fortune, that had bestowed on the pauper heir of Rood advantages so numerous and so dazzling, out of which he had cheated himself, gave him a chance, at least, of present independence, by which, with patient toil, he might have won, if not to the highest places, at least to a position in which he could have forced the world to listen to his explanations, and perhaps receive his excuses: the £5000 that Audley designed for him, and which, in a private memorandum, the statesman had entreated Harley to see safely rescued from the fangs of the law, were made over to Randal by Lord L'Estrange's solicitor; but this sum seemed to him so small after the loss of such gorgeous hopes, and the up-hill path seemed so slow after such short cuts to power, that Randal looked upon the un-

expected bequest simply as an apology for adopting no profession. Stung to the quick by the contrast between his past and his present place in the English world, he hastened abroad. There, whether in distraction from thought, or from the curiosity of a restless intellect to explore the worth of things yet untried, Randal Leslie, who had hitherto been so dead to the ordinary amusements of youth, plunged into the society of damaged gamesters and third-rate *roués*. In this companionship his very talents gradually degenerated, and their exercise upon low intrigues and miserable projects but abased his social character, till, sinking step after step as his funds decayed, he finally vanished out of the sphere in which even profligates still retain the habits, and cling to the *caste*, of gentlemen. His father died; the neglected property of Rood devolved on Randal, but out of its scanty proceeds he had to pay the portions of his brother and sister, and his mother's jointure; the surplus left was scarcely visible in the executor's account. The hope of restoring the home and fortunes of his forefathers had long ceased. What were the ruined hall and its bleak wastes, without that hope which had once dignified the wreck and the desert? He wrote from St Petersburg, ordering the sale of the property. No one great proprietor was a candidate for the unpromising investment; it was sold in lots among small freeholders and retired traders. A builder bought the Hall for its materials. Hall, lands, and name, were blotted out of the map and the history of the county.

The widow, Oliver, and Juliet removed to a provin-

cial town in another shire. Juliet married an ensign in a marching regiment, and died of neglect after childbirth. Mrs Leslie did not long survive her. Oliver added to his little fortune by marriage with the daughter of a retail tradesman, who had amassed a few thousand pounds. He set up a brewery, and contrived to live without debt, though a large family, and his own constitutional inertness, extracted from his business small profits and no savings. Nothing of Randal had been heard of for years after the sale of Rood, except that he had taken up his residence either in Australia or the United States; it was not known which, but presumed to be the latter. Still Oliver had been brought up with so high a veneration of his brother's talents, that he cherished the sanguine belief that Randal would some day appear, wealthy and potent, like the uncle in a comedy; lift up the sunken family, and rear into graceful ladies and accomplished gentlemen, the clumsy little boys, and the vulgar little girls who now crowded round Oliver's dinner-table, with appetites altogether disproportioned to the size of the joints.

One winter day, when from the said dinner-table wife and children had retired, and Oliver sat sipping his half-pint of bad port, and looking over unsatisfactory accounts, a thin terrier, lying on the threadbare rug by the niggard fire, sprang up and barked fiercely. Oliver lifted his dull blue eyes, and saw opposite to him, at the window, a human face. The face was pressed close to the panes, and was obscured by the haze which the

breath of its lips drew forth from the frosty rime that had gathered on the glass.

Oliver, alarmed and indignant, supposing this intrusive spectator of his privacy to be some bold and lawless tramper, stepped out of the room, opened the front door, and bade the stranger go about his business; while the terrier, still more inhospitably yelped and snapped at the stranger's heels. Then a hoarse voice said, "Don't you know me, Oliver? I am your brother Randal! Call away your dog, and let me in." Oliver stared aghast—he could not believe his slow senses—he could not recognise his brother in the gaunt grim apparition before him. But at length he came forward, gazed into Randal's face, and, grasping his hand in amazed silence, led him into the little parlour. Not a trace of the well-bred refinement which had once characterised Randal's air and person was visible. His dress bespoke the last stage of that terrible decay which is significantly called the "shabby genteel." His mien was that of the skulking, timorous, famished vagabond. As he took off his greasy tattered hat, he exhibited, though still young in years, the signs of premature old age. His hair, once so fine and silken, was of a harsh iron-grey, bald in ragged patches; his forehead and visage were ploughed into furrows; intelligence was still in the aspect, but an intelligence that instinctively set you on your guard—sinister—gloomy—menacing.

Randal stopped short all questioning. He seized the small modicum of wine on the table, and drained it at a draught. "Pooh," said he, "have you nothing that

warms a man better than this?" Oliver, who felt as if under the influence of a frightful dream, went to a cupboard and took out a bottle of brandy three-parts full. Randal snatched at it eagerly, and put his lips to the mouth of the bottle. "Ah," said he, after a short pause, "this comforts; now give me food." Oliver hastened himself to serve his brother; in fact, he felt ashamed that even the slip-shod maid-servant should see his visitor. When he returned with such provisions as he could extract from the larder, Randal was seated by the fire, spreading over the embers emaciated bony hands, like the talons of a vulture.

He devoured the cold meat set before him with terrible voracity, and nearly finished the spirits left in the bottle; but the last had no effect in dispersing his gloom. Oliver stared at him in fear—the terrier continued to utter a low suspicious growl.

"You would know my history?" at length said Randal, bluntly. "It is short. I have tried for fortune and failed—I am without a penny and without a hope. You seem poor—I suppose you cannot much help me. Let me at least stay with you for a time—I know not where else to look for bread and for shelter."

Oliver burst into tears and cordially bade his brother welcome. Randal remained some weeks at Oliver's house, never stirring out of the doors, and not seeming to notice, though he did not scruple to use, the new habiliments which Oliver procured ready-made, and placed, without remark, in his room. But his presence soon became intolerable to the mistress of the house,

and oppressive even to its master. Randal, who had once been so abstemious that he had even regarded the most moderate use of wine as incompatible with clear judgment and vigilant observation, had contracted the habit of drinking spirits at all hours of the day; but though they sometimes intoxicated him into stupor, they never unlocked his heart nor enlivened his sullen mood. If he observed less acutely than of old, he could still conceal just as closely. Mrs Oliver Leslie, at first rather awed and taciturn, grew cold and repelling, then pert and sarcastic, at last undisguisedly and vulgarly rude. Randal made no retort; but his sneer was so galling that the wife flew at once to her husband, and declared that either she or his brother must leave the house. Oliver tried to pacify and compromise, with partial success; and, a few days afterwards, he came to Randal and said, timidly, "You see, my wife brought me nearly all I possess, and you don't condescend to make friends with her. Your residence here must be as painful to you as to me. But I wish to see you provided for; and I could offer you something—only it seems, at first glance, so beneath——"

"Beneath what?" interrupted Randal, witheringly. "What I was—or what I am? Speak out!"

"To be sure you are a scholar; and I've heard you say fine things about knowledge, and so forth; and you'll have plenty of books at your disposal, no doubt; and you are still young, and may rise—and——"

"Hell and torments!—Be quick—say the worst or the best!" cried Randal, fiercely.

"Well then," said poor Oliver, still trying to soften the intended proposal, "you must know that our poor sister's husband was nephew to Dr Felpem, who keeps a very respectable school. He is not learned himself, and attends chiefly to arithmetic, and book-keeping, and such matters—but he wants an usher to teach the classics; for some of the boys go to college. And I have written to him, just to sound—I did not mention your name till I knew if you would like it; but he will take my recommendation. Board—lodging—fifty pounds a-year; in short, the place is yours if you like it."

Randal shivered from head to foot, and was long before he answered. "Well, be it so; I have come to that. Ha, ha! yes, knowledge is power!" He paused a few moments. "So, the old Hall is razed to the ground, and you are a tradesman in a small country town, and my sister is dead, and I henceforth am—John Smith! You say that you did not mention my name to the schoolmaster—still keep it concealed; forget that I once was a Leslie. Our tie of brotherhood ceases when I go from your hearth. Write, then, to your head master, who attends to arithmetic, and secure the rank of his usher in Latin and Greek for—John Smith!"

Not many days afterwards the *protégé* of Audley Egerton entered on his duties as usher In one of those large cheap schools, which comprise a sprinkling of the

sons of gentry and clergymen designed for the learned professions, with a far larger proportion of the sons of traders, intended, some for the counting-house, some for the shop and the till. There, to this day, under the name of John Smith, lives Randal Leslie.

It is probably not pride alone that induces him to persist in that change of name, and makes him regard as perpetual the abandonment of the one that he took from his forefathers, and with which he had once identified his vaulting ambition; for shortly after he had quitted his brother's house, Oliver read in the weekly newspaper, to which he bounded his lore of the times in which he lived, an extract from an American journal, wherein certain mention was made of an English adventurer who, amongst other aliases, had assumed the name of Leslie—that extract caused Oliver to start, turn pale, look round, and thrust the paper into the fire. From that time he never attempted to violate the condition Randal had imposed on him—never sought to renew their intercourse, nor to claim a brother. Doubtless, if the adventurer thus signalised was the man Oliver suspected, whatever might be imputed to Randal's charge that could have paled a brother's cheek, it was none of the more violent crimes to which law is inexorable, but rather (in that progress made by ingratitude and duplicity, with Need and Necessity urging them on) some act of dishonesty, which may just escape from the law, to sink, without redemption, the name. However this be, there is nothing in Randal's present course of life which forebodes any deeper fall. He has known

what it is to want bread, and his former restlessness subsides into cynic apathy.

He lodges in the town near the school, and thus the debasing habit of unsocial besotment is not brought under the eyes of his superior. The dram is his sole luxury—if it be suspected, it is thought to be his sole vice. He goes through the ordinary routine of tuition with average credit; his spirit of intrigue occasionally shows itself in attempts to conciliate the favour of the boys whose fathers are wealthy—who are born to higher rank than the rest; and he lays complicated schemes to be asked home for the holidays. But when the schemes succeed, and the invitation comes, he recoils and shrinks back—he does not dare to show himself on the borders of the brighter world he once hoped to sway; he fears that he may be discovered to be—a Leslie! On such days, when his taskwork is over, he shuts himself up in his room, locks the door, and drugs himself into insensibility.

Once he found a well-worn volume running the round of delighted school-boys—took it up, and recognised Leonard's earliest popular work, which had, many years before, seduced himself into pleasant thoughts and gentle emotions. He carried the book to his own lodgings—read it again; and when he returned it to its young owner, some of the leaves were stained with tears. Alas! perhaps but the maudlin tears of broken nerves, not of the awakened soul—for the leaves smelt strongly of whisky. Yet, after that re-perusal, Randal Leslie turned suddenly to deeper studies than his hab-

itual drudgeries required. He revived and increased his early scholarship; he chalked the outline of a work of great erudition, in which the subtlety of his intellect found field in learned and acute criticism. But he has never proceeded far in this work. After each irregular and spasmodic effort, the pen drops from his hand, and he mutters, "But to what end? I can never *now* raise a name. Why give reputation to—John Smith?"

Thus he drags on his life; and perhaps, when he dies, the fragments of his learned work may be discovered in the desk of the usher, and serve as hints to some crafty student, who may filch ideas and repute from the dead Leslie, as Leslie had filched them from the living Burley.

While what may be called poetical justice has thus evolved itself from the schemes in which Randal Leslie had wasted rare intellect in baffling his own fortunes, no outward signs of adversity evince the punishment of Providence on the head of the more powerful offender, Baron Levy. No fall in the Funds has shaken the sumptuous fabric, built from the ruined houses of other men. Baron Levy is still Baron Levy the *millionnaire;* but I doubt if at heart he be not more acutely miserable than Randal Leslie, the usher. For Levy is a man who has admitted the fiercer passions into his philosophy of life; he has not the pale blood and torpid heart which allow the scotched adder to doze away its sense of pain. Just as old age began to creep upon the fashionable usurer, he fell in love with a young opera-dancer, whose light heels had turned the

lighter heads of half the *élégans* of Paris and London. The craft of the dancer was proof against all lesser bribes than that of marriage; and Levy married her. From that moment his house, *Louis Quinze*, was more crowded than ever by the high-born dandies whose society he had long so eagerly courted. That society became his curse. The Baroness was an accomplished *coquette;* and Levy (with whom, as we have seen, jealousy was the predominant passion) was stretched on an eternal rack. His low estimate of human nature —his disbelief in the possibility of virtue—added strength to the agony of his suspicions, and provoked the very dangers he dreaded. His sole self-torturing task was that of the spy upon his own hearth. His banquets were haunted by a spectre; the attributes of his wealth were as the goad and the scourge of Nemesis. His gay cynic smile changed into a sullen scowl—his hair blanched into white—his eyes were hollow with one consuming care. Suddenly he left his costly house; left London; abjured all the society which it had been the joy of his wealth to purchase; buried himself and his wife in a remote corner of the provinces; and there he still lives. He seeks in vain to occupy his days with rural pursuits; he to whom the excitements of a metropolis, with all its corruption and its vices, were the sole sources of the turbid stream that he called "pleasure." There, too, the fiend of jealousy still pursues him: he prowls round his demesnes with the haggard eye and furtive step of a thief; he guards his wife as a prisoner, for she threatens every day to escape.

The life of the man who had opened the prison to so many is the life of a jailer. His wife abhors him, and does not conceal it; and still slavishly he dotes on her. Accustomed to the freest liberty—demanding applause and admiration as her rights — wholly uneducated, vulgar in mind, coarse in language, violent in temper —the beautiful Fury he has brought to his home makes that home a hell. Thus, what might seem to the superficial most enviable, is to their possessor most hateful. He dares not ask a soul to see how he spends his gold — he has shrunk into a mean and niggardly expenditure, and complains of reverse and poverty, in order to excuse himself to his wife for debarring her the enjoyments which she anticipated from the Money-Bags she had married. A vague consciousness of retribution has awakened remorse, to add to his other stings. And the remorse coming from superstition, not religion (sent from below, not descending from above), brings with it none of the consolations of a genuine repentance. He never seeks to atone—never dreams of some redeeming good action. His riches flow around him, spreading wider and wider out of his own reach.

The Count di Peschiera was not deceived in the calculations which had induced him to affect repentance, and establish a claim upon his kinsman. He received from the generosity of the Duke di Serrano an annuity not disproportioned to his rank, and no order from his court forbade his return to Vienna. But, in the very summer that followed his visit to

Lansmere, his career came to an abrupt close. At Baden-Baden he paid court to a wealthy and accomplished Polish widow; and his fine person and terrible repute awed away all rivals save a young Frenchman, as daring as himself, and much more in love. A challenge was given and accepted. Peschiera appeared on the fatal ground with his customary *sang-froid*, humming an opera air, and looking so diabolically gay that his opponent's nerves were affected in spite of his courage, and, the Frenchman's trigger going off before he had even taken aim, to his own ineffable astonishment, he shot the Count through the heart, dead.

Beatrice di Negra lived for some years after her brother's death in strict seclusion, lodging within a convent, though she did not take the veil as she at first proposed. In fact, the more she saw of the sisterhood, the more she found that human regrets and human passions (save in some rarely gifted natures) find their way through the barred gates and over the lofty walls. Finally, she took up her abode in Rome, where she is esteemed for a life not only marked by strict propriety, but active benevolence. She cannot be prevailed on to accept from the Duke more than a fourth of the annuity that had been bestowed on her brother; but she has few wants save those of charity; and when charity is really active, it can do so much with so little gold! She is not known in the gayer circles of the city; but she gathers around her a small society composed chiefly of artists and scholars, and is never so

happy as when she can aid some child of genius—more especially if his country be England.

The Squire and his wife still flourish at Hazeldean, where Captain Barnabas Higginbotham has taken up his permanent abode. The Captain is a confirmed hypochondriac, but he brightens up now and then when he hears of any illness in the family of Mr Sharpe Currie, and, at such times, is heard to murmur, "If those seven sickly children should go off, I might still have very great—EXPECTATIONS." For the which he has been roundly scolded by the Squire, and gravely preached at by the Parson. Upon both, however, he takes his revenge in a fair and gentlemanlike way, three times a-week, at the whist-table, the Parson no longer having the Captain as his constant partner, since a fifth now generally cuts in at the table—in the person of that old enemy and neighbour, Mr Sticktorights. The Parson, thus fighting his own battles unallied to the Captain, observes with melancholy surprise that there is a long run of luck against him, and that he does not win so much as he used to do. Fortunately that is the sole trouble—except Mrs Dale's "little tempers," to which he is accustomed—that ever disturbs the serene tenor of the Parson's life. We must now explain how Mr Sticktorights came to cut in at the Hazeldean whist-table. Frank has settled at the Casino with a wife who suits him exactly, and that wife was Miss Sticktorights. It was two years before Frank recovered the disappointment with which the

loss of Beatrice saddened his spirits, but sobered his habits and awoke his reflection. An affection, however misplaced and ill-requited, if honestly conceived and deeply felt, rarely fails to advance the self-education of man. Frank became steady and serious; and, on a visit to Hazeldean, met at a county ball Miss Sticktorights, and the two young persons were instantly attracted towards each other, perhaps by the very feud that had so long existed between their houses. The marriage settlements were nearly abandoned, at the last moment, by a discussion between the parents as to the Right of Way. But the dispute was happily appeased by Mr Dale's suggestion, that as both properties would be united in the children of the proposed marriage, all cause for litigation would naturally cease, since no man would go to law with himself. Mr Sticktorights and Mr Hazeldean, however, agreed in the precaution of inserting a clause in the settlements (though all the lawyers declared that it could not be of any legal avail), by which it was declared, that if, in default of heritable issue by the said marriage, the Sticktorights estate devolved on some distant scion of the Sticktorights family, the right of way from the wood across the waste land would still remain in the same state of delectable dispute in which it then stood. There seems, however, little chance of a lawsuit thus providentially bequeathed to the misery of distant generations—since two sons and two daughters are already playing at hide-and-seek on the terrace where Jackeymo once watered the

orange-trees, and in the Belvidere where Riccabocca had studies his Machiavelli.

Jackeymo, though his master has assessed the long arrears of his wages at a sum which would enable him to have orange-groves and servants of his own, still clings to his former duties, and practises his constitutional parsimony. His only apparent deviation into profusion consists in the erection of a chapel to his sainted namesake, to whom he burns many a votive taper;—the tapers are especially tall, and their sconces are wreathed with garlands whenever a letter with the foreign postmark brings good news of the absent Violante and her English lord.

Riccabocca was long before he reconciled himself to the pomp of his principalities and his title of Duke. Jemima accommodated herself much more readily to greatness, but she retained all her native Hazeldean simplicity at heart, and is adored by the villagers around her, especially by the youth of both sexes, whom she is always ready to marry and to portion;—convinced, long ere this, of the redeemable qualities of the male sex by her reverence for the Duke, who continues to satirise women and wedlock, and deem himself—thanks to his profound experience of the one and his philosophical endurance of the other—the only happy husband in the world. Longer still was it before the sage, who had been so wisely anxious to rid himself of the charge of a daughter, could wean his thoughts from the remembrance of her tender voice

and loving eyes. Not, indeed, till he seriously betook himself to the task of educating the son with whom, according to his scientific prognostics, Jemima presented him shortly after his return to his native land. The sage began betimes with his Italian proverbs, full of hard-hearted worldly wisdom, and the boy was scarce out of the hornbook before he was introduced to Machiavelli. But somehow or other the simple goodness of the philosopher's actual life, with his high-wrought patrician sentiments of integrity and honour, so counteract the theoretical lessons, that the Heir of Serrano is little likely to be made more wise by the proverbs, or more wicked by the Machiavelli, than those studies have practically made the progenitor, whose opinions his countrymen still shame with the title of "Alphonso the Good."

The Duke long cherished a strong curiosity to know what had become of Randal. He never traced the adventurer to his closing scene. But once (years before Randal had crept into his present shelter) in a visit of inspection to the hospital at Genoa, the Duke, with his peculiar shrewdness of observation in all matters except those which concerned himself, was remarking to the officer in attendance, "that for one dull honest man, whom fortune drove to the hospital or the jail, he had found, on investigation of their antecedents, three sharp-witted knaves who had thereto reduced themselves"—when his eye fell upon a man asleep in one of the sick-wards, and recognising the face, not then so

changed as Oliver had seen it, he walked straight up, and gazed upon Randal Leslie.

"An Englishman," said the official. "He was brought hither insensible, from a severe wound on the head, inflicted, as we discovered, by a well-known *chevalier d'industrie*, who declared that the Englishman had outwitted and cheated him. That was not very likely, for a few crowns were all we could find on the Englishman's person, and he had been obliged to leave his lodgings for debt. He is recovering—but there is fever still."

The Duke gazed silently on the sleeper, who was tossing restlessly on his pallet, and muttering to himself; then he placed his purse in the official's hand. "Give this to the Englishman," said he; "but conceal my name. It is true—it is true—the proverb is very true"—resumed the Duke, descending the stairs—"*Più pelli di volpi che di asini vanno in Pellicciaria.*" (More hides of foxes than of asses find their way to the tanner's.)

Dr Morgan continues to prescribe globules for grief, and to administer infinitesimally to a mind diseased. Practising what he prescribes, he swallows a globule of "*caustic*" whenever the sight of a distressed fellow-creature moves him to compassion—a constitutional tendency which, he is at last convinced, admits of no radical cure. For the rest, his range of patients has notably expanded; and under his sage care his patients unquestionably live as long—as Providence pleases. No allopathist can say more.

The death of poor John Burley found due place in the obituary of "literary men." Admirers, unknown before, came forward and subscribed for a handsome monument to his memory in Kensal Green. They would have subscribed for the relief of his widow and children, if he had left any. Writers in magazines thrived for some months on collections of his humorous sayings, anecdotes of his eccentricities, and specimens of the eloquence that had lightened through the tobacco-reek of tavern and club-room. Leonard ultimately made a selection from his scattered writings, which found place in standard libraries, though their subjects were either of too fugitive an interest, or treated in too capricious a manner, to do more than indicate the value of the ore had it been purified from its dross and subjected to the art of the mint. These specimens could not maintain their circulation as the coined money of Thought, but they were hoarded by collectors as rare curiosities. Alas, poor Burley!

The Pompleys sustained a pecuniary loss by the crash of a railway company, in which the Colonel had been induced to take several shares by one of his wife's most boasted "connections," whose estate the said railway proposed to traverse, on paying £400 an acre, in that golden age when railway companies respected the rights of property. The Colonel was no longer able, in his own country, to make both ends meet at Christmas. He is now straining hard to achieve that feat in Boulogne, and has in the process grown so red in the face, that those who meet him in his morning walk on the pier,

bargaining for fish, shake their heads and say, "Old Pompley will go off in a fit of apoplexy; a great loss to society; genteel people the Pompleys! and very highly 'connected.'"

The vacancy created in the borough of Lansmere by Audley Egerton's death, was filled up by our old acquaintance, Haveril Dashmore, who had unsuccessfully contested that seat on Egerton's first election. The naval officer was now an admiral, and perfectly reconciled to the Constitution, with all its alloy of aristocracy.

Dick Avenel did not retire from Parliament so soon as he had anticipated. He was not able to persuade Leonard, whose brief fever of political ambition was now quenched in the calm fountain of the Muse, to supply his place in the senate, and he felt that the house of Avenel needed one representative. He contrived, however, to devote, for the first year or two, much more of his time to his interests at Screwstown than to the affairs of his country, and succeeded in baffling the over-competition to which he had been subjected, by taking the competitor into partnership. Having thus secured a monopoly at Screwstown, Dick, of course, returned with great ardour to his former enlightened opinions in favour of free-trade. He remained some years in Parliament; and though far too shrewd to venture out of his depth as an orator, distinguished himself so much by his exposure of "humbug" on an important Committee, that he acquired a very high reputation as a man of business, and gradually

became so in request amongst all members who moved for "Select Committees," that he rose into consequence; and Mrs Avenel, courted for his sake, more than her own, obtained the wish of her heart, and was received as an acknowledged *habituée* into the circles of fashion. Amidst these circles, however, Dick found that his home entirely vanished; and when he came home from the House of Commons, tired to death, at two in the morning, disgusted at always hearing that Mrs Avenel was not yet returned from some fine lady's ball, he formed a sudden resolution of cutting Parliament, Fashion, and London altogether; withdrew his capital, now very large, from his business; bought the remaining estates of Squire Thornhill; and his chief object of ambition is in endeavouring to coax or bully out of their holdings all the small freeholders round, who had subdivided amongst them, into poles and furlongs, the fated inheritance of Randal Leslie. An excellent justice of the peace, though more severe than your old family proprietors generally are;—a spirited landlord, as to encouraging and making at a proper per-centage, all permanent improvements on the soil, but formidable to meet if the rent be not paid to the day, or the least breach of covenant be heedlessly incurred on a farm that he could let for more money;—employing a great many hands in productive labour, but exacting rigorously from all the utmost degree of work at the smallest rate of wages which competition and the poor-rate permit; the young and robust in his neighbourhood never stinted in work, and the aged and infirm, as lumber

worn out, stowed away in the workhouse;—Richard Avenel holds himself an example to the old race of landlords; and, taken altogether, is no very bad specimen of the rural civilisers whom the application of spirit and capital raise up in the new.

From the wrecks of Egerton's fortune, Harley, with the aid of his father's experience in business, could not succeed in saving, for the statesman's sole child and heir, more than a few thousand pounds; and but for the bonds and bills which, when meditating revenge, he had bought from Levy, and afterwards thrown into the fire—paying dear for that detestable whistle—even this surplus would not have been forthcoming.

Harley privately paid out of his own fortune the £5000 Egerton had bequeathed to Leslie; perhaps not sorry, now that the stern duty of exposing the false wiles of the schemer was fulfilled, to afford some compensation even to the victim who had so richly deserved his fate; and pleased, though mournfully, to comply with the solemn request of the friend whose offence was forgotten in the remorseful memory of his own projects of revenge.

Leonard's birth and identity were easily proved, and no one appeared to dispute them. The balance due to him as his father's heir, together with the sum Avenel ultimately paid to him for the patent of his invention, and the dowry which Harley insisted upon bestowing on Helen, amounted to that happy competence which escapes alike the anxieties of poverty and (what to one

of contemplative tastes and retired habits are often more irksome to bear) the show and responsibilities of wealth. His father's death made a deep impression upon Leonard's mind; but the discovery that he owed his birth to a statesman of so great a repute, and occupying a position in society so conspicuous, contributed not to confirm, but to still, the ambition which had for a short time diverted him from his more serene aspirations. He had no longer to win a rank which might equal Helen's. He had no longer a parent, whose affections might be best won through pride. The memories of his earlier peasant-life, and his love for retirement—in which habit confirmed the constitutional tendency—made him shrink from what a more worldly nature would have considered the enviable advantages of a name that secured the entrance into the loftiest sphere of our social world. He wanted not that name to assist his own path to a rank far more durable than that which kings can confer. And still he retained in the works he had published, and still he proposed to bestow on the works more ambitious that he had, in leisure and competence, the facilities to design with care, and complete with patience, the name he had himself invented, and linked with the memory of the low-born mother. Therefore, though there was some wonder, in drawing-rooms and clubs, at the news of Egerton's first unacknowledged marriage, and some curiosity expressed as to what the son of that marriage might do—and great men were prepared to welcome, and fine ladies to invite and bring out, the heir to the statesman's grave repute—yet

wonder and curiosity soon died away; the repute soon passed out of date, and its heir was soon forgotten. Politicians who fall short of the highest renown are like actors; no applause is so vivid while they are on the stage—no oblivion so complete when the curtain falls on the last farewell.

Leonard saw a fair tomb rise above Nora's grave, and on the tomb was engraved the word of WIFE, which vindicated her beloved memory. He felt the warm embrace of Nora's mother, no longer ashamed to own her grandchild; and even old John was made sensible that a secret weight of sorrow was taken from his wife's stern silent heart. Leaning on Leonard's arm, the old man gazed wistfully on Nora's tomb, and muttering—"Egerton! Egerton! 'Leonora, the first wife of the Right Honourable Audley Egerton!' Ha! I voted for him. She married the right colour. Is that the date? Is it so long since she died? Well, well! I miss her sadly. But wife says we shall both now see her soon; and wife once thought we should never see her again—never; but I always knew better. Thank you, sir. I'm a poor creature, but these tears don't pain me—quite otherwise. I don't know why, but I'm very happy. Where's my old woman? She does not mind how much I talk about Nora now. Oh, there she is! Thank you, sir, humbly! but I'd rather lean on my old woman—I'm more used to it; and—wife, when shall we go to Nora?"

Leonard had brought Mrs Fairfield to see her parents, and Mrs Avenel welcomed her with unlooked-for kind-

ness. The name inscribed upon Nora's tomb softened the mother's heart to her surviving daughter. As poor John had said—"She could *now* talk about Nora;" and in that talk, she and the child she had so long neglected discovered how much they had in common. So when, shortly after his marriage with Helen, Leonard went abroad, Jane Fairfield remained with the old couple. After their death, which was within a day of each other, she refused, perhaps from pride, to take up her residence with Leonard, but she settled near the home which he subsequently found in England. Leonard remained abroad for some years. A quiet observer of the various manners and intellectual development of living races—a rapt and musing student of the monuments that revive the dead—his experience of mankind grew large in silence, and his perceptions of the Sublime and Beautiful brightened into tranquil art under their native skies.

On his return to England he purchased a small house amidst the most beautiful scenes of Devonshire, and there patiently commenced a work in which he designed to bequeath to his country his noblest thoughts in their fairest forms. Some men best develop their ideas by constant exercise; their thoughts spring from their brain ready-armed, and seek, like the fabled goddess, to take constant part in the wars of men. And such are, perhaps, on the whole, the most vigorous and lofty writers; but Leonard did not belong to this class. Sweetness and serenity were the main characteristics of his genius; and these were deepened by his pro-

found sense of his domestic happiness. To wander alone with Helen by the banks of the murmurous river —to gaze with her on the deep still sea—to feel that his thoughts, even when most silent, were comprehended by the intuition of love, and reflected on that translucent sympathy so yearned for, and so rarely found by poets—these were the Sabbaths of his soul, necessary to fit him for its labours—for the Writer has this advantage over other men, that his repose is not indolence. His duties, rightly fulfilled, are discharged to earth and men in other capacities than those of action. If he is not seen among those who act, he is all the while maturing some noiseless influence, which will guide or illumine, civilise or elevate, the restless men whose noblest actions are but the obedient agencies of the thoughts of writers. Call not, then, the Poet whom we place amidst the Varieties of Life, the sybarite of literary ease, if returning on Summer eves, Helen's light footstep by his musing side, he greets his sequestered home, with its trellised flowers smiling out from amidst the lonely cliffs in which it is embedded; while lovers still, though wedded long, they turn to each other, with such deep joy in their speaking eyes, grateful that the world, with its various distractions and noisy conflicts, lies so far from their actual existence—only united to them by the happy link that the writer weaves invisibly with the hearts that he moves and the souls that he inspires. No! Character and circumstance alike unfitted Leonard for the strife of the thronged literary democracy; they led towards the

development of the gentler and purer portions of his nature—to the gradual suppression of the more combative and turbulent. The influence of the happy light under which his genius so silently and calmly grew, was seen in the exquisite harmony of its colours, rather than the gorgeous diversities of their glow. His contemplation, intent upon objects of peaceful beauty, and undisturbed by rude anxieties and vehement passions, suggested only kindred reproductions to the creative faculty by which it was vivified; so that the whole man was not only a poet, but, as it were, a poem—a a living idyl, calling into pastoral music every reed that sighed and trembled along the stream of life. And Helen was so suited to a nature of this kind, she so guarded the ideal existence in which it breathes! All the little cares and troubles of the common practical life she appropriated so quietly to herself—the stronger of the two, as should be a poet's wife, in the necessary household virtues of prudence and forethought. Thus, if the man's genius made the home a temple, the woman's wisdom gave to the temple the security of the fortress. They have only one child—a girl; they call her Nora. She has the father's soul-lit eyes, and the mother's warm human smile. She assists Helen in the morning's noiseless domestic duties; she sits in the evening at Leonard's feet, while he reads or writes. In each light grief of childhood she steals to the mother's knee; but in each young impulse of delight, or each brighter flash of progressive reason, she springs to the father's breast. Sweet Helen, thou hast taught her

this, taking to thyself the shadows even of thine infant's life, and leaving to thy partner's eyes only its rosy light!

But not here shall this picture of Helen close. Even the Ideal can only complete its purpose by connection with the Real. Even in solitude the writer must depend upon Mankind.

Leonard, at last, has completed the work, which has been the joy and the labour of so many years—the work which he regards as the flower of all his spiritual being, and to which he has committed all the hopes that unite the creature of to-day with the generations of the future. The work has gone through the press, each line lingered over with the elaborate patience of the artist, loathe to part with the thought he has sculptured into form, while an improving touch can be imparted by the chisel. He has accepted an invitation from Norreys. In the restless excitement (strange to him, since his first happy maiden effort), he has gone to London. Unrecognised in the huge metropolis, he has watched to see if the world acknowledge the new tie he has woven between its busy life and his secluded toil. And the work came out in an unpropitious hour; other things were occupying the public; the world was not at leisure to heed him, and the book did not penetrate into the great circle of readers. But a savage critic had seized on it, and mangled, distorted, deformed it, confounding together defect and beauty in one mocking ridicule; and the beauties have not yet found an exponent nor the defects a defender; and the publisher

shakes his head, points to groaning shelves, and delicately hints that the work which was to be the epitome of the sacred life within life, does not hit the taste of the day. Leonard thinks over the years that his still labour has cost him, and knows that he has exhausted the richest mines of his intellect, and that long years will elapse before he can recruit that capital of ideas which is necessary to sink new shafts, and bring to light fresh ore; and the deep despondency of intellect, frustrated in its highest aims, has seized him, and all he has before done is involved in failure by the defeat of the crowning effort. Failure, and irrecoverable, seems his whole ambition as writer; his whole existence in the fair Ideal seems to have been a profitless dream, and the face of the Ideal itself is obscured. And even Norreys frankly, though kindly, intimates that the life of a metropolis is essential to the healthful intuition of a writer in the intellectual wants of his age; since every great writer supplies a want in his own generation, for some feeling to be announced, some truth to be revealed; and as this maxim is generally sound, as most great writers have lived in cities, Leonard dares not dwell on the exceptions; it is only success that justifies the attempt to be an exception to the common rule; and with the blunt manhood of his nature, which is not a poet's, Norreys sums up with, "What then? One experiment has failed; fit your life to your genius, and try again." Try again! Easy counsel enough to the man of ready resource and quick

combative mind; but to Leonard, how hard and how harsh! "Fit his life to his genius!"—renounce contemplation and Nature for the jostle of Oxford Street!—would that life not scare away the genius for ever? Perplexed and despondent, though still struggling for fortitude, he returns to his home, and there at his hearth awaits the Soother, and there is the voice that repeats the passages most beloved, and prophesies so confidently of future fame; and gradually all around smiles from the smile of Helen. And the profound conviction that Heaven places human happiness beyond the reach of the world's contempt or praise, circulates through his system, and restores its serene calm. And he feels that the duty of the intellect is to accomplish and perfect itself—to harmonise its sounds into music that may be heard in Heaven, though it wake not an echo on the earth. If this be done, as with some men, best amidst the din and the discord, be it so; if, as with him, best in silence, be it so too. And the next day he reclines with Helen by the sea-shore, gazing calmly as before on the measureless sunlit ocean; And Helen, looking into his face, sees that it is sunlit as the deep. His hand steals within her own, in the gratitude that endears beyond the power of passion, and he murmurs gently, "Blessed be the woman who consoles."

The work found its way at length into fame, and the fame sent its voices loud to the poet's home. But the applause of the world had not a sound so sweet to

his ear, as when, in doubt, humiliation, and sadness, the lips of his Helen had whispered, "Hope! and believe."

Side by side with this picture of Woman the Consoler, let me place the companion sketch. Harley L'Estrange, shortly after his marriage with Violante, had been induced, whether at his bride's persuasions, or to dissipate the shadow with which Egerton's death still clouded his wedded felicity, to accept a temporary mission, half military, half civil, to one of our colonies. On this mission he had evinced so much ability, and achieved so signal a success, that on his return to England he was raised to the peerage, while his father yet lived to rejoice that the son who would succeed to his honours had achieved the nobler dignity of honours, not inherited, but won. High expectations were formed of Harley's Parliamentary success; but he saw that such success, to be durable, must found itself on the knowledge of wearisome details, and the study of that practical business, which jarred on his tastes, though it suited his talents. Harley had been indolent for so many years—and there is so much to make indolence captivating to a man whose rank is secured, who has nothing to ask from fortune, and who finds at his home no cares from which he seeks a distraction;—so he laughed at ambition in the whim of his delightful humours, and the expectations formed from his diplomatic triumph died away. But then came one of those political crises in which men ordinarily indifferent to politics rouse themselves to the recollection, that the

experiment of legislation is not made upon dead matter, but on the living form of a noble country. And in both Houses of Parliament the strength of party is put forth.

It is a lovely day in spring, and Harley is seated by the window of his old room at Knightsbridge—now glancing to the lively green of the budding trees—now idling with Nero, who, though in canine old age, enjoys the sun like his master—now repeating to himself, as he turns over the leaves of his favourite Horace, some of those lines that makes the shortness of life the excuse for seizing its pleasures and eluding its fatigues, which form the staple morality of the polished epicurean—and Violante (into what glorious beauty her maiden bloom has matured !) comes softly into the room, seats herself on a low stool beside him, leaning her face on her hands, and looking up at him through her dark, clear, spiritual eyes; and as she continues to speak, gradually a change comes over Harley's aspect—gradually the brow grows thoughtful, and the lips lose their playful smile. There is no hateful assumption of the would-be "superior woman"—no formal remonstrance, no lecture, no homily which grates upon masculine pride, but the high theme and the eloquent words elevate unconsciously of themselves, and the Horace is laid aside—a Parliamentary Blue Book has been, by some marvel or other, conjured there in its stead—and Violante now moves away as softly as she entered. Harley's hand detains her.

"Not so. Share the task, or I quit it. Here is an

extract I condemn you to copy. Do you think I would go through this labour if you were not to halve the success?—halve the labour as well!"

And Violante, overjoyed, kisses away the implied rebuke, and sits down to work, so demure and so proud by his side. I do not know if Harley made much way in the Blue Book that morning; but a little time after he spoke in the Lords, and surpassed all that the most sanguine had hoped from his talents. The sweetness of fame and the consciousness of utility once fully tasted Harley's consummation of his proper destinies was secure. A year later, and his voice was one of the influences of England. His boyish love of glory revived; no longer vague and dreamy, but ennobled into patriotism, and strengthened into purpose. One night, after a signal triumph, he returned home, with his father, who had witnessed it, and Violante—who, all lovely, all brilliant though she was, never went forth in her lord's absence, to lower, among fops and flatterers, the dignity of the name she so aspired to raise—sprang to meet him. Harley's eldest son—a boy yet in the nursery—had been kept up later than usual; perhaps Violante had anticipated her husband's triumph, and wished the son to share it. The old Earl beckoned the child to him, and laying his hand on the infant's curly locks, said with unusual seriousness—

"My boy, you may see troubled times in England before these hairs are as grey as mine; and your stake in England's honour and peace will be great. Heed

this hint from an old man who had no talents to make a noise in the world, but who yet has been of some use in his generation. Neither sounding titles, nor wide lands, nor fine abilities, will give you real joy, unless you hold yourself responsible for all to your God and to your country; and when you are tempted to believe that the gifts you may inherit from both entail no duties, or that duties are at war with true pleasure, remember how I placed you in your father's arms, and said, 'Let him be as proud of you some day, as I at this hour am of him.'"

The boy clung to his father's breast, and said manfully, "I will try!" Harley bent his fair smooth brow over the young earnest face, and said softly, "Your mother speaks in you!"

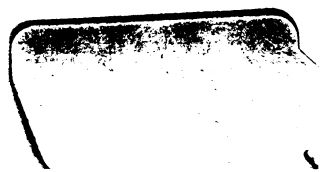
Then the old Countess, who had remained silent and listening on her elbow-chair, rose and kissed the Earl's hand reverently. Perhaps in that kiss there was the repentant consciousness how far the active goodness she had often secretly undervalued had exceeded, in its fruits, her own cold unproductive powers of will and mind. Then, passing on to Harley, her brow grew elate, and the pride returned to her eye.

"At last," she said, laying on his shoulder that light firm hand, from which he no longer shrunk—"at last, O my noble son, you have fulfilled all the promise of your youth!"

"If so," answered Harley, "it is because I have found what I then sought in vain." He drew his arm

around Violante, and added, with half tender, half solemn smile—"Blessed is the woman who exalts!"

So, symbolled forth in these twin and fair flowers which Eve saved for Earth out of Paradise, each with the virtue to heal or to strengthen, stored under the leaves that give sweets to the air;—here, soothing the heart when the world brings the trouble—here, recruiting the soul which our sloth or our senses enervate, leave we woman, at least, in the place Heaven assigns to her amidst the multiform "Varieties of Life."

Farewell to thee, gentle Reader; and go forth to the world, O My Novel!

END OF MY NOVEL.